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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

SHORT STORIES *of*
TO-DAY & YESTERDAY

First Volumes

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Short Stories
of To-day and Yesterday

GUY DE
MAUPASSANT



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

GUY DE MAUPASSANT was born at the Château de Miromesnil, in Normandy, on August 5th, 1850, and died in Paris on July 6th, 1893. He was educated at the preparatory college for priests at Yvetot and the lycée at Rouen. After serving in the war of 1870, of which there are reminiscences in many of his tales, including "The Dumpling," he came to Paris, where, between 1871 and 1880, he earned his living as a civil servant. "Home Sweet Home" depicts the life of a typical French official. His leisure time he spent in boating on the Seine, pursuing amorous adventures, and writing verses, short stories, and dramatic pieces. He published nothing at this time, however. His literary guide was Flaubert, who refers to him as his disciple whom he loves as a son. With the publication of "The Dumpling" (1880) he gained immediate recognition and turned definitely to the writing of short stories. Between 1880 and 1890 he published in various papers three hundred stories, to which must be added several posthumous tales, as well as six novels and some dramatic pieces. In 1884 he began to suffer from nervous troubles. In 1892 he had to be placed in an asylum, and he died without recovering his reason. His illness is reflected in many tales of horror and madness. Though, under the tuition of Flaubert, he became a very careful writer, he was not a literary man. He was fond of exercise, fresh

air, laughter, ribaldry, and, like a true Norman, of money.

De Maupassant has become a classic as a master of short stories among a nation whose writers are acknowledged to excel in the short story. In him is found the combination of a zest for telling everything with the power to eliminate, select, and compress, which is the necessary condition for that difficult art of presenting a panorama in miniature. His prose has all the clearness, balance, and restraint of the French classical style, and in descriptions of nature rises to poetic beauty. He is also the master of realism. Realism, however, consists for him not in the conscientious exploration of 'grime' or the accumulation of documents to render the external environment, but in an interest in actual life and a belief that life is queerer, more unexpected, more dramatic than the distortions of it made by the idealizations of writers or by the conventions of moralists, that it is exciting for the very reason that it is different from what we are taught to believe about it. He is the enemy of convention, respectability, and pharisaism; and the friend of the weak and of outcasts. He shows himself in both these rôles in "The Dumpling" and "The Chairmender." His realism is most attractive in his sketches of the peasant life of his own people, the Normans. Their hardness, meanness, and cunning are described with a penetrating criticism. It is, however, that kind of criticism which, because it sees all, makes us forgive and appreciate all.

The excitement of seeing life realistically was not sufficient, and began to wane. De Maupassant tried to explore deeper into it and beyond it. But in this

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attempt he could get no further than Schopenhauer's pessimism, which filled him with a growing despair and horror of life as the illness grew which culminated finally in his madness.

M. L.

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FOR several days in succession the shreds of a routed army had been passing through the town. The once organized troops were now a disorderly rabble. The men, who had long, matted growths on their chins and wore battered uniforms, slouched along listlessly, without their colours and without any formation. They all looked crushed and broken, devoid of thought and will-power. They marched on from mere force of habit, and as soon as a man stopped he dropped down from exhaustion. The majority were reservists, men of peace, taken away from their quiet, comfortable life, who walked bowed down by the weight of their rifles, or smart militia lads, as prone to panic as to enthusiasm, as ready for attack as for flight. In their midst was a sprinkling of 'red coats'—survivors of a division mown down in a great battle. A few smart gunners also marched in line with these motley infantrymen, while now and again there flashed the helmet of a booted dragoon who had difficulty in keeping up with the more light-footed men of the line.

Detachments of *francs-tireurs*, named grandiloquently "Avengers of Defeat," "Citizens of the Grave," "Fellows in Death," went past in their turn, looking like highwaymen.

Their leaders, retired drapers or corn-merchants, ex-dealers in soap or tallow, temporary warriors whose commissions had been won by the length of their purses or of their moustaches, went armed to the teeth and made a great display of trimmings and gold lace. They talked in loud tones, discussed plans of campaign, and acted as though they alone sustained France in the throes of death upon their braggarts' shoulders. But they sometimes stood in fear of their own men, a gang of ruffians given to looting and debauchery whose courage often knew no limits.

There was a rumour that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen.

The men of the Garde Nationale, who for the last two months had been engaged in reconnoitring cautiously the neighbouring woods, sometimes shooting their own sentries and preparing for action every time a rabbit stirred in a bush, had returned to their firesides. Their arms, their uniforms, all the paraphernalia of slaughter, which had formerly been the terror of every milestone within a radius of nine miles, had suddenly vanished.

The last of the French army had just crossed the Seine, making for Pont-Audemer by way of Saint-Lever and Bourg-Achard. Right in the rear came the General, on foot, with an orderly officer on either side. He was in despair, unable to attempt anything with these ill-assorted fragments of his army, overwhelmed himself in the terrible rout of a people used to victory, whose

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epic prowess had now been dealt a crushing blow.

A deep calm of silent expectation and dread now settled over the town. Many a portly, respectable citizen, emasculated by a life of business, anxiously awaited the conquerors, in terror lest his roasting spits or big kitchen knives should be regarded as arms.

Life seemed at a standstill. The shops were closed, the streets silent. A stray inhabitant now and again, frightened by this stillness, would hurry along by the walls. When suspense becomes an agony, the arrival of the enemy becomes a thing longed for.

On the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops some Uhlans suddenly appeared, no one knew whence, and galloped through the town. A little later a black mass of troops came down the St Catherine Hill, while two other invading torrents were seen streaming in by the Darnetal and Bois Guillaume roads. At one and the same moment the advance guards of the three corps met in the Town Hall Square, and down every street in the neighbourhood the German army began to arrive, battalion after battalion, while the cobbles rang under their hard, measured tread.

Orders shouted in strange, guttural voices came past the houses, which seemed abandoned and lifeless, though behind the closed shutters there were eyes watching these victors whom the 'right of war' had made masters of the city, the property, and the lives of all. In their darkened

rooms the inhabitants were in the grip of that dismay which comes from natural cataclysms, great catastrophic upheavals of the earth against which no thought or strength can avail. The same feeling shows itself anew each time the established order of things is disturbed, when security no longer exists, but everything which has hitherto been safeguarded by the laws of man or of Nature is placed at the mercy of an unreasoning and ruthless brute force. The earthquake which crushes a whole people under their falling houses, the river in spate which sweeps along drowned peasants together with beams torn from roofs, or the triumphant army butchering the defenders and leading the rest of the population away as prisoners, pillaging in the name of the Sword and giving thanks to God amidst the cannon's roar, are all so many terrifying scourges which put to rout all belief in Eternal Justice, all the trust we have been taught to place in the protection of heaven and in the reason of man.

At every door small detachments of men knocked and then vanished within. This was occupation following on invasion, and the duty of making a favourable impression upon their conquerors now devolved upon the vanquished.

After some time, with the disappearance of the first panic, there followed a new feeling of calm. In many houses the Prussian officer took his meals with the family. Sometimes he was a gentleman and, out of politeness, would deplore the sufferings of France, expressing his personal

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distaste for his part in this war. People were grateful to him for this feeling, and, moreover, some day his protection might be needed. Humouring him might mean a few men less to feed. Besides, why offend a man on whom you are entirely dependent? Such behaviour would be foolhardy rather than brave, and foolhardiness is no longer a fault of the burghers of Rouen, as it was in the times of her heroic resistance in which their city won her glory. Finally, the conclusive argument drawn from French good manners was used. Surely it was still permissible to show politeness in one's home, provided no intimacy with the foreign soldier was displayed in public. In the street he was a stranger, but within the four walls of the house people were ready to talk to him, and he sat longer and longer every evening, warming himself by the family fireside.

Gradually the town itself resumed its ordinary aspect. The French as yet scarcely came out of their houses, but the streets swarmed with Prussian soldiers. The officers of the Blue Hussars, who arrogantly trailed their huge implements of death along the pavement, treated the plain townsmen with a contempt which did not appear to be vastly greater than that shown to them by their own Chasseur officers who had sat drinking at the same *cafés* the year before.

But yet there was something in the air, some indefinable and intangible quality, an unbearable foreign atmosphere, the pervasive odour of invasion. It filled private houses and public squares, tainted the food, and made every one

feel like a traveller in a distant country among dangerous savages.

The conquerors demanded vast sums of money, and the inhabitants went on paying. The latter were, it is true, rich enough, but the more prosperous a Norman tradesman becomes, the more he is pained at the idea of any sacrifice and at the sight of the smallest fraction of his possessions passing into other hands.

But six or nine miles below the town, following the course of the river, near Croisset, Dieppedale, or Biessart, the bargemen and fishermen often brought up from the bottom the corpse of some German, swollen in his uniform, who had been stabbed or kicked to death or had had his head broken by a stone or had been pushed into the water off a bridge. The mud of the river buried these hidden acts of savage but justifiable vengeance, these emblazoned feats of heroism. For these secret attacks were more dangerous than open battles, without any of their resounding glory. But there are always to be found a few fearless souls whom hatred of the invader inspires to die for a cause.

At length, as the invaders, although imposing their rigid discipline on the town, had committed none of the atrocities with which repute had credited them through the whole course of their victorious march, men plucked up courage, and the appetite for business woke once more in the hearts of the Rouen shopkeepers. Some of them had important interests at Havre, which was held by the French army, and they wished to try to

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make this port, going by land to Dieppe, where they intended to embark.

The influence of German officers whose acquaintance had been made was used, and a permit for leave was obtained from the General-in-Command.

A large four-horse coach was accordingly engaged for this journey ; ten persons had reserved seats in it, and it was decided to start on a Tuesday morning, before daybreak, so as to avoid attracting a crowd.

For some time there had been a hard frost, and on Monday about three o'clock great black clouds, travelling from the north, brought snow, which fell without any break from evening onward.

At half-past four in the morning the travellers met in the yard of the Hôtel de Normandie, where they were to take their seats in the coach.

They were still heavy with sleep and shivering with cold under their wraps. They saw each other with difficulty, in the dark, and under their piles of heavy winter clothing they all looked like fat priests dressed in long cassocks. Two men recognized each other ; a third accosted them, and they began a conversation. " I am bringing my wife," said one. " I am doing the same," said another. " And I too," came from the third. The first went on : " We are not coming back to Rouen. If the Prussians get near Havre, we'll make for England." The three were all of the same type and had the same plans.

But there was no sign of harnessing the horses.

A small lantern, carried by a stable-boy, emerged now and again from a dim doorway, only to vanish immediately through another. Horses' hoofs were pawing the ground, their sound deadened by stable litter. A man's voice talking to the animals and swearing could be heard from the far end of the building. The faint tinkling of bells indicated the handling of the harness. This soon became a clear, continuous jingling, in rhythm with the horses' movement, sometimes stopping, then starting again with a sudden jerk to the accompaniment of the dull beat of an iron-shod hoof on the floor.

The door closed suddenly, and all was still. Silence had fallen on the half-frozen travellers, who stood stiff and motionless.

An unbroken veil of white, shimmering snow-flakes was coming down on the earth, blurring all shapes and overlaying everything with a powdery, moss-like covering of ice. In the vast stillness of the town, lying peacefully in the grip of winter, nothing could be heard but the vague, elusive rustling of the falling snow, which has no name and is felt rather than heard, being made of the mingling of light atoms which seemed to fill all space and to shroud the universe.

The man appeared once more with his lantern, dragging along by a rope a dejected-looking horse, which followed him reluctantly. He placed the animal alongside the carriage-pole, put on the reins, and spent a long time in fastening the harness, since he could use only one hand, the other being engaged in carrying the lantern. As

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he was going back to fetch the other horse he noticed that the travellers were standing still and were already white with snow, so he said to them: "Why don't you get into the carriage? You'll be under shelter, at any rate."

They had not thought of this, apparently, and now they made a rush for the coach. The three men installed their wives at the far end and then got in themselves. The other blurred and vague shapes followed, and took the remaining places without exchanging a word. The floor had a layer of straw, into which their feet sank. The ladies at the far end had brought small copper foot-warmers fed with chemical charcoal. These they now lighted, and for some time in subdued voices discoursed on their merits, telling one another facts long familiar to all of them.

At last the coach was ready. It had a team of six horses instead of four, on account of the difficulty of the roads. "All inside?" asked a voice without. A "Yes" came from within, and they started.

The coach crawled along at a snail's pace. Its wheels sank into the snow, and the whole body-work groaned with dull creaking noises. The reeking horses slipped and panted, while the driver's enormous whip cracked incessantly, flickering from side to side, knotting and uncoiling itself like a thin snake, and now and again descending with a sharp flick on the swelling hind-quarters of a horse, which thereupon strained in a more violent effort.

Insensibly daylight grew apace. The light

snowflakes, which a true-blooded son of Rouen had likened to a rain of cotton, no longer fell. A dingy light filtered through the dense black clouds, which rendered more dazzling the whiteness of the landscape. Here and there stood out a row of tall, frosted trees or a cottage under a hood of snow.

Inside the carriage the occupants scrutinized each other inquisitively by the melancholy light of dawn. In the best seats, at the far end, Monsieur and Madame Loiseau dozed opposite each other. They were wholesale wine merchants of the Rue Grand-Pont. Loiseau, who had formerly been a clerk, had bought up the business of his employer after the latter's financial crash and had become rich. He sold very bad wine at very low prices to small village retailers. By his friends and acquaintances he was thought a cunning rascal, with all the tricks and all the jollity of the true Norman.

So firmly established was his reputation as a sharper that one evening at the Prefecture a local celebrity, Monsieur Tournell, author of some fables and songs and possessed of a fine caustic wit, seeing the ladies somewhat drowsy, suggested to them a game of *Loiseau vole*.¹

The joke flew through the Prefect's reception rooms, thence passed to the drawing-rooms of the town, and for a month set the whole neighbourhood laughing.

Loiseau was further famous for practical jokes

¹ This is a pun on *l'oiseau*, the bird, and *vole*, which means (1) flies, (2) steals.

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of all kinds, in good or bad taste. No one could mention his name without adding, "Loiseau is priceless."

He was short, but his paunch bulged like a balloon beneath a ruddy expanse of face framed by grizzled whiskers.

His wife was a tall, stout, determined, loud-voiced woman. With a habit of quick decision, she was the methodical business brain of the concern, to which he contributed the zest and animation of his bristling gaiety.

Next to them, invested with the higher dignity of a superior caste, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of established position in the cotton business, owner of three factories, officer of the Legion of Honour, and member of the Conseil Général. Under the Empire he had remained all the time leader of the friendly Opposition, merely to extort a higher price for going over to the cause which he combated, according to his own expression, with the weapons of chivalry. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who was much younger than her husband, was still the comfort of officers of good family garrisoned at Rouen.

A dainty, pretty little ball of fur, she sat opposite her husband, looking with a pained expression at the sorry interior of the carriage.

Their neighbours, the Count and Countess Hubert de Bréville, were the bearers of one of the oldest and most aristocratic names of Normandy. The Count, a tall old nobleman, strove to emphasize by tricks of dress his natural likeness to King Henry IV, who, according to a

legend which shed lustre on the family, had made pregnant a dame de Bréville, for which deed her husband was made a Count and Governor of a province.

Count Hubert was the local representative of the Orleanist party in the Conseil Général, where he sat with Monsieur Carré-Lamadon. The story of his marriage with the daughter of a petty Nantes shipowner had always remained a mystery. But as the Countess had the grand manner, excelled as a hostess, and even enjoyed the reputation of having been a mistress of one of Louis-Philippe's sons, all the aristocracy paid court to her. Hers was the first drawing-room in the district, the only one which was exclusive and which preserved the old tradition of gallantry.

The fortune of the de Brévilles, all in landed estate, was reputed to yield an income of half a million francs.

These six were the personages of the party. They belonged to that solid, comfortable class which lives on private incomes and stands for respectability, law and order, religion and morality.

It happened curiously that all the women were seated on the same side. Next to the Countess also sat two nuns, telling their long rosaries and muttering paternosters and aves. One of them was old and deeply pitted with smallpox, as though she had received point-blank a charge of grape-shot full in the face. The other was a puny creature with a pretty but sickly face and a con-

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sumptive chest, devoured by the burning faith which creates martyrs and visionaries.

Opposite the two sat a man and a woman who attracted the attention of all.

The man was the well-known Cornudet, the democrat and the terror of respectable folk. For the last twenty years his long red beard had been dipped in the beer mugs of every democratic *café*. With the help of his brothers and friends, he had run through a substantial fortune left to him by his father, a retired confectioner, and now he was impatiently looking forward to the coming of the Republic, which was at last to confer on him the office so well merited by his countless revolutionary potations. On the 4th of September, probably as a result of a practical joke, he imagined that he had been appointed Prefect and tried to enter upon his duties. But the clerks, who remained in sole possession, refused to recognize him, so that he was forced to beat a retreat. He was, however, a good-natured, harmless, obliging fellow, and had devoted himself with exemplary zeal to organizing the defence of the town. He had had pits dug in the open country, all the young trees felled in the neighbouring forests, and traps set on all the roads. Then, satisfied with his preparations, at the approach of the enemy he had hastily fallen back upon the town. Now he thought of making himself of greater service at Havre, where new entrenchments would be needed.

The woman, one of those called 'gay,' was renowned for her premature corpulence, which

had gained her the titles of "the Dumpling" and "Fatty." Short, round all over, fat as butter, with chubby fingers like strings of small sausages nipped in at the joints, vast bust swelling under her bodice, her skin stretched and shining, she was nevertheless a tasty morsel in great demand, so pleasing was her freshness to the eyes. Her face was like a red apple or a peony ready to burst into flower. Set in the upper part of it were two magnificent dark eyes, into which long, thick lashes cast their shadow. In the lower part was her small, charming mouth, inviting kisses with its softness, and showing two rows of tiny, dazzling teeth. It was said that she possessed other qualities beyond all estimation.

As soon as she was recognized the respectable women began to murmur to each other, and the words "prostitute," "public scandal," were uttered in such loud whispers that they made her look up. Thereupon she bestowed so bold and challenging a glance upon her neighbours that a deep silence ensued, and every one sat with downcast eyes, except Loiseau, who watched her with a rakish, roguish look. Very soon, however, the three ladies resumed their conversation. The presence of this brazen hussy had suddenly called forth in them a friendly feeling to one another bordering on intimacy. Since legalized love always gives itself airs in the presence of its free-lance brother, they felt they must present a united front of wedded respectability before this shameless mercenary.

The three husbands, similarly drawn together

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by their conservative instinct at the sight of Cornudet, talked of money matters with something of scorn for the poor. The Count alluded to the damage done by the Prussians, the losses which he would incur from stolen cattle and ruined crops, speaking with the complacency of the lordly owner of ten millions who would scarcely feel this havoc for the space of a year. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, having acquired much experience in the cotton business, had taken the precaution of sending six hundred thousand francs to be invested in England, as provision for a rainy day for which he was always laying by. As for Loiseau, he had managed to sell to the French Commissariat all the common wines still in his cellar, so that the Government owed him a substantial sum, which he counted on receiving at Havre.

The three of them exchanged swift and friendly glances. In spite of social differences, they all felt brothers through the common tie of money, being members of the great freemasonry of those who have, of those who can jingle gold when they thrust their hands into their trousers pockets.

The coach made such slow progress that by ten in the morning they had covered twelve miles only. Thrice the men got out to walk up the hills. They all began to feel uneasy, for they were to have lunched at Tôtes, but now they had no hopes of reaching it before nightfall. Every one was on the look-out for a wayside inn, when the coach foundered in a snowdrift, from which it took two hours to extricate it.

Their growing hunger began to depress their spirits ; but there was no sign of so much as a cookshop or public-house, the approach of the Prussians and the passage of the starving French troops having frightened away all the tradespeople.

The men ran to the farmhouses by the roadside to get food, but they could not find even bread there, as the suspicious peasants had hidden away their stores for fear of being plundered by the soldiers, who, not having a morsel to bite, took by force whatever they could lay their hands on. Toward one o'clock Loiseau declared that he was distinctly conscious of a sinking in the stomach. Every one had long been suffering from his complaint, and the craving for food, growing steadily stronger, had killed all conversation.

From time to time some one yawned ; and another would follow suit. One after the other, according to their nature, manners, and social position, they opened their mouths, noisily or quietly, hastily putting their hands before the gaping chasms whence the breath issued in a cloud of steam.

The Dumpling stooped down several times as though to fetch out something from under her petticoats. She would hesitate for a moment, look at her neighbours, and then quietly sit up again. All faces were pale and drawn. Loiseau vowed he would give a thousand francs for a knuckle of ham. His wife made as if to protest, but restrained herself. Talk of squandering

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money was always painful to her, and she could not even understand a joke on that subject.

"The fact is, I don't feel well," said the Count. "Why did I never think of bringing food?" Every one blamed himself for the same forgetfulness.

Cornudet, however, had a flask of rum. This he offered round, but it was coldly declined. Loiseau alone took a couple of sips, saying as he returned the flask with thanks: "That's some good anyhow; it warms you up and makes you forget your hunger." The spirit put him in a good humour, and he suggested that they should do as they did on the little boat in the song and eat the fattest of the party. This indirect allusion to the Dumpling shocked the more refined people, and he received no answer. Cornudet alone smiled. The two nuns had left off their muttering; they sat motionless, with their hands thrust into their long sleeves and their eyes steadfastly downcast. They were no doubt offering up to heaven the suffering it sent them.

At last, at three o'clock, when they were in the middle of an interminable plain without a single village in sight, the Dumpling briskly bent down and drew from under the seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

First she drew forth a little earthenware plate, next a dainty silver cup, then a large dish in which lay two whole chickens, already carved and set in jelly. Other good things could be seen wrapped up in the basket—pies, fruits, and sweets, provisions for a three days' journey,

intended to make her independent of the cookery of the inns. The necks of four bottles were sticking out between the packets of food. She took the wing of a chicken and began to eat it daintily, with one of those rolls of bread called, in Normandy, *régence*.

All eyes were fixed on her. As the odour of the food began to diffuse, nostrils widened, mouths watered copiously, and the muscles of the jaws contracted painfully close to the ear. The contempt of the ladies for this abandoned female rose to a fury ; they wanted to kill her or throw her out of the coach into the snow—cup, basket, food, and all.

But Loiseau's eyes devoured the dish of chicken. "Well done!" said he. "This lady has shown more foresight than we. Some people always think of everything."

She looked up at him, saying : "Would you like some? It's hard going without food all day."

He bowed. "Frankly, I can't refuse ; I can't last any longer. War is war, isn't it, madame?" Then he added, with a glance round the company : "It's nice to find obliging people on an occasion like this." He spread his newspaper over his trousers so as not to stain them, and with the point of a knife, which he always carried in his pocket, he took up a leg of chicken coated with jelly, bit at it, and chewed it with such obvious enjoyment that a deep sigh of anguish went up from his fellow-travellers.

In a low voice the Dumpling humbly invited

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the two nuns to share her meal. Both immediately accepted, and after some murmured thanks, without raising their eyes, they began to eat ravenously. Cornudet also did not decline his neighbour's invitation, and, together with the nuns, they made up a sort of table by spreading newspapers on their knees.

Their mouths opened and shut incessantly in a feverish activity of swallowing, masticating, and gulping down food. Loiseau, busy in his corner, whispered to his wife to follow his example. She held out for a long time, but at length, convulsed by a final pang which went right through her, she yielded. Then her husband, choosing his words, asked if "their charming friend would allow him to offer a small portion to Madame Loiseau." "Most certainly," she said with a pleasant smile, handing her the dish.

An awkward moment ensued when the first bottle of Bordeaux was opened, as there was only one cup. They passed it to one another, each wiping it first. Cornudet alone set his mouth where the rim was still moist from his neighbour's lips, acting, no doubt, in a spirit of gallantry.

With people eating all round them, the Count and Countess and Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon, choked by the odour of food, endured the abominable torments to which Tantalus has given his name. Suddenly the manufacturer's young wife gave a sigh which made all turn round to look at her. She was as white as the snow outside; her eyes closed; her head drooped; she

had fainted. Her distracted husband appealed to every one for help. They all lost their heads, but the elder of the two nuns, supporting the patient's head, put the Dumpling's cup to her lips and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty little lady stirred, opened her eyes, smiled, and in a faint voice declared that she felt quite well now. But, to prevent another attack, the nun made her drink a whole glassful of Bordeaux, adding : " It's just hunger, and hunger only."

The Dumpling, blushing in confusion, looked at the four travellers who were still feasting, and stammered out : " Now, if only I dared to offer these ladies and gentlemen——" but she broke off, fearing a snub.

Loiseau spoke. " Dash it all, in cases like this we are all brothers and should help each other. Come, ladies, don't stand on ceremony ; accept her offer. We don't know whether we shall even find a night's lodging. At the rate we are going we shan't get to Tôtes before noon to-morrow." They hesitated, no one caring to take it on himself to say " Yes."

It was the Count who decided the issue. He turned to the nervous Dumpling, and, putting on his most aristocratic air, he said : " Madame, we gratefully accept."

It was only the first step that was difficult. The Rubicon once crossed, they helped themselves without stint. They emptied the contents of the basket. It still contained a *pâté de foie gras*, a *pâté* of larks, a piece of smoked tongue, Crassane pears, some Pont-l'Évêque cheese, cakes, and a

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cupful of pickled gherkins and onions, the Dumpling having the universal feminine taste for raw foods.

It was impossible to eat her food without talking to her. Accordingly they entered into conversation, at first with reserve, and then, as her manners were excellent, with less restraint. Madame de Bréville and Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had great breeding, were tactful and gracious. The Countess, in particular, displayed that winsome condescension of the great lady whom no touch can sully, and was charming. Only stout Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a policeman, remained obdurate, saying little and eating much.

They naturally spoke of the war. Tales were told of Prussian atrocities and of French acts of heroism; all these people who were running away paid tribute to the bravery of others. Presently they came to their own experiences, and the Dumpling, speaking with real feeling and the warm eloquence with which women of her class sometimes express their natural emotions, narrated the circumstances that had led to her leaving Rouen. "At first I thought I might stay," she was saying. "My house was well stocked, and I thought I might as well help to feed a few soldiers rather than leave my native town and go God knows where. But when I set eyes on these Prussians, it was too much for me. They made my blood boil, and I cried with shame all day. Oh, if only I were a man! But there! I watched them out of my window, those fat swine, with their

spiked helmets. My maid held my hands to stop me from flinging my furniture down. Then some of them were billeted on me. I sprang at the throat of the first one. They are no more difficult to strangle than anyone else, and I should have been the death of that one if I hadn't been pulled back by the hair. After that I had to hide. When at last I got the chance I came away, and here I am."

She was heartily congratulated and began to rise in the opinion of her companions, who had not shown such spirit. Cornudet listened to her with the benevolent and approving smile of an apostle. Even so does a priest hearken to a pious member of his flock who praises the Lord. For long-bearded democrats consider patriotism their monopoly, just as the men in cassocks think religion theirs. He proceeded to lay down the law, speaking with the rhetorical exaggeration which he echoed from the proclamations posted up on the walls day after day. He wound up with a peroration in which he inveighed magisterially against that "blackguard Badinguet."

But the Dumpling at once flared up, for she was a Bonapartist. She grew very red, and stammered with rage. "I should just have liked to see you people in his place. A fine thing that would have been! It's you who betrayed him! There would be nothing for it but to leave France if there were only scamps like you to govern us!"

Cornudet remained impassive, with his smile of scornful superiority. But a storm of abuse was

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felt to be imminent when the Count interfered, to pacify, not without difficulty, the enraged woman by declaring with authority that all sincere opinions were entitled to respect. But the Countess and the manufacturer's wife, who cherished in their hearts the unreasonable hatred which the respectable classes felt for the Republic and the instinctive devotion which every woman has for the fine feathers of a despotic government, felt themselves involuntarily drawn toward this prostitute, who had such great personal dignity, and whose convictions so closely resembled their own.

The basket was empty. Among them the ten people had cleared it out without difficulty, and they only regretted that it had not been larger. The conversation still went on for a while, but was a little damped now that there was no more to eat.

Night was falling, and the darkness gradually deepened. The cold, more keenly felt during the process of digestion, made the Dumpling shiver in spite of her fat. Madame de Bréville offered her her foot-warmer, the charcoal of which had been renewed several times since the morning, and she accepted it at once, as her feet were like ice. Madame Carré-Lamadon and Madame Loiseau gave theirs to the nuns.

The driver had lighted the lamps, which cast a bright glare upon the cloud of steam rising from the sweating flanks of the wheelers. On either side of the road a white ribbon of snow seemed to unwind under the shifting reflection of the

lights. Within the coach all was dark, but suddenly there was a scuffle between the Dumpling and Cornudet. Loiseau, whose eyes were searching the gloom, thought he saw the man with the long beard start violently away as though a deft blow had been dealt him noiselessly.

Little points of light began to twinkle on the road ahead. It was Tôtes. They had been travelling for eleven hours. With the four halts of half an hour each to rest and feed the horses, this made thirteen hours on the road. They entered the town and stopped before the Commercial Hotel.

The door of the carriage opened. A familiar sound made all the travellers start. It was the rattling of a scabbard on the ground. A German voice was heard shouting something.

Though the coach had stopped, no one got out. It seemed as though they all expected to be massacred on alighting. Then the driver appeared, holding in his hand a lantern which suddenly flashed to the farthest end of the coach, lighting up two rows of terrified faces open-mouthed and with eyes dilated with surprise and panic.

Beside the driver, in the full glare of the lamp, stood a German officer, a tall young man, very slender and fair, tightly squeezed into his uniform like a girl in her corset, and wearing on one side his polished flat cap, which made him look like the porter of an English hotel. His enormous moustache, consisting of long, straight hairs and tapering away gradually at each side into a single fair thread, so fine that it was impossible to say

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where it ended, seemed to weigh down the corners of his mouth, and, dragging down his cheeks, gave a drooping line to his lips.

In the French of Alsace he asked the travellers to alight, saying in a harsh tone: "Vill you tescent, ladies and ghentlemen?"

The two nuns were the first to comply, with the docility acquired from their religious training in complete obedience. The Count and Countess appeared next, followed by the manufacturer and his wife; then came Loiseau, pushing in front of him his better and larger half. When he set foot on the ground, he said to the officer, "Good evening, sir," prompted by prudence rather than politeness. The German, with the insolence of power, stared at him and made no answer. The Dumpling and Cornudet, though they were near the carriage door, were the last to alight, and maintained a proud and dignified air in the enemy's presence. The Dump-ling tried to control and restrain herself, while the democrat twisted his long reddish beard with a theatrical, though somewhat tremulous, hand. They were anxious to keep their dignity, realizing that in an encounter such as that every one is in some measure his country's representative. Both were equally disgusted with the servility of their fellow-travellers. She tried to show greater pride than her neighbours, the respectable women, while he, feeling that an example was expected from him, kept up throughout his pose the task of inspiring the resistance which he had taken on when he dug up the roads.

They entered the large kitchen of the inn, where the German made them show the permits signed by the Commanding Officer giving the name, description, and occupation of each of the travellers. Having examined them all minutely, and compared their appearance with the descriptions, he said sharply, "It is goot," and disappeared. They breathed once more. They were still hungry, and ordered supper. It would take half an hour to get ready ; and while two maids were seemingly busy preparing it they went to look at the bedrooms. These were all in a long corridor ending in a door with glass panes marked with a significant number.

Just as they were sitting down to supper the innkeeper himself appeared. He was a retired horse-dealer, a stout man troubled with asthma and frog in the throat, constantly wheezing and coughing. His father had bequeathed him the name of Follenvie.

"Is Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset here ?" he asked.

The Dumpling turned round with a start. "Yes," she said.

"Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer wants to speak to you at once."

"To me ?"

"Yes, if you are Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset."

Troubled, she thought for a moment, and then gave her answer in plain language :

"I daresay he does want me. But I shan't go."

There was a hubbub round her ; every one

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talked and tried to guess the reason for this order. The Count came up to her.

"You are wrong, madame. Your refusal may involve not only yourself, but your fellow-travellers also, in serious difficulties. We should never oppose those who have power. Surely there is no risk in complying. No doubt it's about the omission of some formality."

They all seconded him ; they begged, urged, lectured, and finally convinced her. They were all afraid of the complications that might result from an act of rashness. At last she said : "I'm doing it for your sakes ; make no mistake about that."

The Countess took her hand and said : "And we thank you for it."

She left the room, and they waited for her before sitting down to supper.

Each was sorry he had not been sent for instead of this headstrong, quick-tempered female, and mentally rehearsed platitudes in case his turn should come.

She reappeared at the end of ten minutes, breathing hard, scarlet in the face, and choking with indignation. "The cad ! The cad !" she stammered.

They were all eager to hear about it, but she would not say a word. As the Count pressed her she answered with great dignity : "No, it's not your concern. I can't tell you."

They gathered round a deep soup-tureen which emitted a smell of cabbages. In spite of this alarm, it was a merry supper. The cider was good,

and the two Loiseaus and the nuns drank it from motives of economy. The others asked for wine, except Cornudet, who ordered beer. He had a special way of opening the bottle, of making the liquid froth, and of contemplating it, tilting the glass which he held up to the lamplight; the better to admire its colour. When he drank, his long beard, which had kept the tint of his favourite beverage, seemed to quiver with affection; he squinted in his attempt not to lose sight of his mug, and appeared to be fulfilling the only purpose for which he was made. It was as though in his mind an alliance and kinship, as it were, had been established between the two absorbing interests which engrossed his life: Pale Ale and the Revolution. Certain it was that he could not taste the one without thinking of the other.

The Follenvie couple took their meal at the extreme end of the table. The husband, wheezing like a broken-down engine, was prevented by a constriction in the chest from speaking during the meal; but his wife talked without a moment's pause. She described all her feelings at the arrival of the Prussians, telling what they did and what they said, and cursing them in the first place because they cost her money, and in the second place because she had two sons in the army. She addressed her remarks principally to the Countess, flattered at the idea of speaking to a titled lady. Presently she lowered her voice to talk of delicate topics, while her husband interrupted her occasionally with, "You had much better keep your mouth shut, Madame Follenvie." She took

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no notice of him and went on : " Yes, madame, these fellows do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, and then more potatoes and pork. And they're not clean, I can tell you ! They leave their filth about all over the place, begging your pardon. And if you could only see them drilling hour after hour, day after day ! There they are, all in a field, and it's all the time forward march, backward march, left wheel, right wheel. If at least they worked on the land or mended the roads in their own country ! No, madame, these soldiers are no good to any one. To think that the poor have to feed them only for them to learn how to butcher people ! I am only an old ignorant woman, it's true, but when I see them wearing their nerves to shreds with tramping about from morning to night, I say to myself, ' When there are people finding out so many useful things, why should others put themselves to such trouble to do harm ? ' Isn't it really horrible to kill people, whether they are Prussians, or Englishmen, or Poles, or Frenchmen ? If you take revenge on some one who does you an injury, it's wrong, because you're punished for it ; but when they shoot down our boys like game, it's right, I suppose, since those who kill most get medals. No, I shall never get to the bottom of this."

Cornudet raised his voice.

" War is a barbarous practice when a peaceful neighbour is attacked ; but in defence of one's country it is a sacred duty."

The old woman bent her head.

" Yes, self-defence is quite a different matter.

But wouldn't it be better to kill all the kings who make war for sport ? ”

Cornudet's eyes flashed.

“ Well said, comrade ! ” he exclaimed.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was plunged in thought. Though he was a fanatical adorer of great soldiers, this peasant woman's common sense made him think of the wealth which would accrue to a country from so many hands now idle and in consequence a drain on the State, from so many sources of energy now maintained in uselessness, if only these were put to work on great industrial enterprises which it would take centuries to complete.

Loiseau left his seat to begin a whispered conversation with the innkeeper. The fat man laughed and coughed and spat ; his enormous paunch shook with merriment at his neighbour's jokes, and he gave him an order for six half-hogs-heads of Bordeaux to be delivered in the spring, when the Prussians had gone.

Supper was hardly over when, dropping with fatigue, they went off to bed.

Loiseau, however, who had kept his eyes open for everything, after helping his wife to bed, applied now his ear, now his eye, to the keyhole, to investigate what he called “ the mysteries of the passage.”

After about an hour he heard a rustling, and, taking a hasty peep, he saw the Dumpling, whose figure looked more full than ever in a blue cashmere dressing-gown trimmed with white lace. She held a candle in her hand and was making for

the glass door at the end of the corridor. A door on the same side as Loiseau's room was set ajar, and when she returned, after a few minutes, Cornudet, in his shirt-sleeves, was following her. They whispered together and then stopped. The Dumpling seemed to offer a strong resistance to his entering her bedroom. Loiseau, unfortunately, could not make out what they were saying, but as they began to raise their voices toward the end, he caught a few words. Cornudet was being insistent and eager.

"Come, don't be silly. What difference can it make to you?"

She seemed indignant and answered:

"No, my dear, there are times when such things are out of place. Besides, here it would be a disgrace."

He obviously failed to see her point, for he asked her "Why?" Thereupon she flew into a rage and raised her voice even higher. "Why? You don't see why? With Prussians in the house and in the next room perhaps?"

He said no more. The patriotic delicacy which would not let this loose woman suffer herself to be embraced while the enemy was within the gates must have revived his weakening self-respect. For after merely kissing her he stole back to his own room.

Loiseau, all roused up, left the keyhole, cut a caper, and put on his nightcap. Then turning back the sheet under which lay the hard frame of his spouse, he woke her with a kiss, murmuring: "Do you love me, darling?"

The whole house soon became plunged in silence. But presently, in some part hard to locate, which might have been either the cellar or the attic, there arose a powerful, monotonous, and rhythmic snore—a dull, long-drawn-out sound with the throbbing notes of a boiler under pressure. It was Monsieur Follenvie sleeping.

As it had been arranged to start at eight the next morning, they all met in the kitchen. But the coach, its hood covered with a roof of snow, stood forlorn in the middle of the courtyard, without horses or driver. They hunted in vain for the latter in stables, granary, and coach-house. The men then resolved to scour the countryside for him and went out. They came to the town square with the church at the end, and on both sides low houses, in which Prussian soldiers could be seen. The first one they noticed was peeling potatoes. The next, a little further on, was washing down the barber's shop. A third, with a beard which went up almost into his eyes, was petting a squalling infant, whom he tried to pacify by rocking on his knee. The stout peasant women whose menfolk were 'out at the front' assigned by dumb show their tasks to these docile conquerors. There was wood to be split, coffee to be ground, the soup to be made. One soldier was even doing the washing for his hostess, an old body who was completely helpless.

The Count, in amazement, questioned the beadle who was cleaning out the presbytery. The old church rat replied :

"Oh, these aren't a bad lot; they're not

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Prussians, I hear say ; they come from further off, I don't exactly know from where. Every one of them has left behind a wife and children in his country, and war is no joke to them. There's crying for the menfolk over there just as here. I know. And they'll be as hard up in their country as we are in ours. Hereabouts, at least, it's not so bad just now, because they don't do any harm, and they work as hard as though they were in their own homes. You see, sir, poor people must help each other. It's the big wigs who make wars."

Cornudet, indignant at the fraternization between conquerors and conquered, went back, preferring to shut himself up in the hotel. Loiseau made a joke : " Repopulation." Monsieur Carré-Lamadon moralized : " Reparation."

But the driver was nowhere to be seen. At last they found him in the village *café*, seated amicably at a table with the officer's orderly. The Count accosted him.

" Were you not ordered to harness the horses for eight o'clock ? "

" Oh, yes, but afterwards I got other orders."

" What orders ? "

" Not to harness them at all."

" Who gave you these ? "

" The Prussian officer, if you want to know."

" Why ? "

" I don't know. Go and ask him. I'm told not to harness the horses, and I don't. That's all."

" Did the officer himself tell you this ? "

"No, sir. The innkeeper gave me the order from him."

"When was this?"

"Last night as I was going up to bed."

The three men returned to the inn, with uneasy minds. They asked for Monsieur Follenvie, but the maid replied that, owing to his asthma, he never got up before ten. He had even given explicit orders not to be called at an earlier hour, except in case of fire.

They wanted to see the officer. But this was absolutely impossible, although he was staying in the hotel, Monsieur Follenvie alone being authorized to speak to him on civilian business. They waited. The women went back to their rooms, where they busied themselves with trifles.

Cornudet installed himself in the corner of the high kitchen chimney, where a big fire was blazing. He had one of the small *café* tables placed there, ordered a pot of beer, and pulled out his pipe. The latter stood almost as high in the estimation of the democrat as its owner, as though in serving Cornudet it had served the State. It was a magnificent meerschaum with a curving stem, beautifully seasoned, as black as its master's teeth, but fragrant and gleaming, dear to his touch, a necessary adjunct to his physiognomy. He sat still, his eyes fixed now on the fire in the hearth, now on the ring of froth on his beer, and each time he took a pull he passed his long, thin fingers through his greasy locks with an air of contentment, meanwhile sucking the fringe of froth from his moustache.

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Under pretext of wanting to stretch his legs, Loiseau went out to get orders for his wine from the local retailers.

The Count and the manufacturer began talking politics. They discussed the future of France. One of them put his trust in the Orleans, the other in an unknown saviour, a hero who would appear in the darkest hour, a du Guesclin, a Joan of Arc, perhaps, or another Napoleon the First. Ah! if only the Prince Imperial were not so young! Cornudet, as he listened to them, smiled as one who is in the confidence of the Fates. Meanwhile he shed the aroma of his pipe over the kitchen.

As the clock struck ten Monsieur Follenvie made his appearance. He was bombarded with questions. But all he could say was to repeat two or three times without any variation: "The officer said to me, just like this, 'Monsieur Follenvie, you will give orders not to have the carriage ready for those travellers to-morrow. They are not to leave without my orders. You understand? Very good!'"

Then they wanted to see the officer. The Count sent up his card, on which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon added his name with all his distinctions. The Prussian sent answer that he would receive these men after his luncheon, about one o'clock.

The ladies came down. In spite of their anxiety, all managed to eat a little. The Dump-ling looked ill and in great distress. They were just finishing their coffee when the orderly came for the two gentlemen.

Loiseau joined them, but when they tried to enlist Cornudet to add to the impressiveness of their deputation, he declared haughtily that he was resolved never to have truck with the Germans and ensconced himself once more in the chimney corner, ordering another pot of beer.

The three went up and were introduced into the best room of the inn, where the officer received them. Stretched full length in an arm-chair, with his feet on the mantelpiece, he was smoking a long porcelain pipe. He wore a gaudy dressing-gown, looted, no doubt, from the abandoned dwelling of some middle-class owner of abominable taste. He did not rise, nor did he greet them or look at them. He was a perfect specimen of the boorishness which is natural to victorious soldiers.

At last, after some minutes had elapsed, he said: "Vat do you vant?"

The Count acted as spokesman. "We wish to leave."

"You can't."

"Might I venture to ask the reason of your refusal?"

"Pecause I do not vish it."

"I would respectfully point out to you that your General-in-Command has given us a permit to go to Dieppe, and I do not think we have done anything to warrant your severity."

"I do not vish it; dat's all. You may go."

The three bowed and withdrew.

They spent a melancholy afternoon. The German officer's whim was incomprehensible, and

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the most fantastic and disturbing explanations crossed their minds. They all stayed in the kitchen, arguing endlessly and imagining the most improbable causes. Perhaps they were being kept as hostages. But to what end? Or were they being taken away as prisoners? Or, more likely still, would a large ransom be exacted? The thought of this caused a mad panic among them. The wealthiest were the most frightened, already seeing themselves compelled to purchase their lives with bags of gold poured into the lap of this arrogant soldier. They racked their brains to devise plausible lies so that they might hide their riches and make themselves out to be very poor folk indeed. Loiseau took off his watch-chain and hid it in his pocket. Their apprehensions increased with the fall of night. The lamp was lit, and as there were still two hours before dinner Madame Loiseau suggested a game of *trente-et-un* to pass the time. They all agreed. Even Cornudet joined in the game, putting his pipe out from politeness.

The Count shuffled the cards and dealt. The Dumpling held thirty-one at the very start. Soon they were so absorbed in the game that the spectre which haunted their minds was laid. But Cornudet noticed that the Loiseau couple were working together to cheat.

Just as they were sitting down to table Monsieur Follenvie came in. In his rasping voice, he said: "The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset has not yet changed her mind."

The Dumpling, very pale, remained standing. Then she suddenly turned crimson, and was so choked with rage that she could no longer utter a word. At last she burst out: "Tell that Prussian cad, that dirty pig, that piece of muck, that I'll never do it, never, never, never; do you hear?"

The stout innkeeper left the room. Thereupon they all came round her, pestering her with questions and entreaties to divulge the secret of her interview with him. At first she refused, but presently, goaded on to exasperation, she blurted out: "What does he want? What does he want? He wants to go to bed with me."

So keen was their indignation that no one felt shocked at her words. Cornudet brought his mug down on the table with such violence that it broke. There was an outcry against this shameful swashbuckler. They were swept by a gust of anger, and all became united in opposition, as though each one had to pay a share of the sacrifice demanded from her. The Count declared in tones of disgust that these fellows were behaving like the barbarians of old. The women in particular lavished upon her active demonstrations of tender sympathy. The two nuns, who appeared for meals only, sat with bowed heads and said nothing.

When the first burst of anger had subsided they went on with their dinner in spite of all. But little was said, every one being pensive.

The ladies retired early; the men while smoking got up a game of *écarté*, to which they invited

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Monsieur Follenvie, intending to question him diplomatically as to the means to be taken to overcome the officer's opposition. But he gave the whole of his mind to his cards, listening to no question, giving no answer, and calling out continually: "Play, gentlemen, play." So absorbed was he that he forgot to spit, with the result that his chest was like an organ accompanying with pauses elaborate vocal arias, while his wheezing lungs ran through the whole gamut of asthma from the deep notes of the bass to the shrill squawk of a cockerel trying his voice.

He even declined to go to bed when his wife, dropping with fatigue, came to look for him. She went off by herself, being an 'early bird,' always up with the sun, while her husband liked late hours and was always ready to make a night of it with friends. "Put my egg-flip before the fire," he called out, and turned to his game again. When it became obvious that nothing could be got out of him they declared it was time to stop, and each went off to bed.

The next morning they rose again fairly early, with a vague hope, an increasing desire to be gone, and a dread of the day they would have to spend in this horrible little inn.

The horses, alas! were still in the stable, the driver being still invisible. For want of anything to do they went out and hung about the coach.

Luncheon was a gloomy meal. Their feeling for the Dumpling began to cool off, for night, which brings counsel, had somewhat changed their view of the case. By now they were almost

resentful toward this female for not having paid the Prussian a secret visit in order to provide a pleasant surprise for her companions the next morning. What could be simpler? And, besides, who would have known of it? She could have saved her face by giving the officer to understand that she had taken pity on their distress. After all, it couldn't matter very much for her!

But as yet no one uttered his thoughts.

In the afternoon, as they were dying of boredom, the Count suggested a walk on the outskirts of the village. They all wrapped themselves up carefully, and the little party set out, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred staying by the fireside, and of the nuns, who spent their day either in the church or at the priest's house.

The cold, which was growing sharper daily, cruelly nipped their noses and ears; they felt such pain in their feet that each step was torture; and as the countryside opened up before them, stretching away endlessly under its white pall, it presented such a frightening and dreary aspect that they all immediately turned back with chilled soul and oppressed heart.

The four women walked in front, the husbands following at a little distance.

Loiseau, who realized the facts of the situation, suddenly asked if that 'wench' meant to keep them hanging on much longer in such a hole of a place. The Count, always a gentleman, said that so painful a sacrifice could not be demanded of a woman. It must come from herself. Monsieur

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Carré-Lamadon remarked that if the French, as was thought likely, should turn on their enemy by way of Dieppe, the armies must inevitably meet at Tôtes. This idea made the other two anxious. "Suppose we escape on foot?" said Loiseau. The Count shrugged his shoulders. "In this snow and with our wives? How can you think of it? Besides, we should be immediately pursued, caught in a quarter of an hour, and brought back as prisoners at the mercy of the military." What he said was true, and they relapsed into silence.

The ladies talked about clothes, but a certain feeling of constraint seemed to break up the union between them.

Suddenly the officer appeared at the end of the street. His tall, uniformed figure, with its wasp-like waist, was silhouetted against the snowy background. He walked with his knees well apart, with the gait characteristic of military men who are careful not to dirty their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, but looked scornfully at the men, who, however, had enough self-respect not to take off their hats, though Monsieur Loiseau made the outline of a movement to do so.

The Dumpling blushed to the tips of her ears, while the three married women felt deeply humiliated at being met by him in the company of this female whom he had treated so cavalierly.

They talked of him, of his face and figure. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who, having known

many officers, appraised them with the judgment of an expert, found this one not at all bad ; she was even sorry that he was not French, because he would make a very smart Hussar, about whom all the women would be sure to rave.

Back in the hotel they could find nothing to do. Sharp words were exchanged about nothings. Dinner was finished quickly and in silence, and each went up to bed looking to sleep as a means of killing time.

Next day they came down with weariness in their looks and bitterness in their hearts. The women scarcely spoke to the Dumpling.

The church bell rang for a christening. The Dumpling had a child which was being brought up by some peasants at Yvetot. She saw it less than once a year, and never gave it a thought ; but the idea of the infant about to be christened made a strong emotion well up suddenly within her for her own baby, and nothing would do but she must be present at the ceremony.

As soon as she had left the room they all looked at each other and brought their chairs close together. It was felt that something must be done. Loiseau had an inspiration. His suggestion was to ask the officer to keep the Dumpling and let the others go.

Monsieur Follenvie once more undertook to convey the message, but he came back almost immediately. The German officer, who had a knowledge of human nature, had turned him out of the room. He intended to keep the whole party until his desire should be satisfied.

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Thereupon Madame Loiseau gave expression to her innate vulgarity. "All the same," she burst forth, "we are not going to stay here till we die of old age. After all, it's the creature's trade to do this with any man. I don't see that she has a right to refuse one more than another. Just think of it! She has taken on anything that came along in Rouen, even coachmen! Yes, indeed, madame! Even the Prefect's coachman! I ought to know, because he buys his wine from us. And now, when it's a question of getting us out of a hole, she puts on airs, the hussy! Personally, I think the officer has behaved very nicely. He has perhaps had to go without for a long time, and there were three of us whom he would no doubt have preferred. But what does he do? He is satisfied with the one who is everybody's property. Married women he respects. Remember, he is master here. All he had to do was to say, 'I wish it,' and he could have taken us by force with the help of his soldiers."

The other two women gave a little shudder. Pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon's eyes sparkled, and she turned a little pale, as if she already felt the officer taking her by force.

The men, who had been talking by themselves, now came up to them. Loiseau, in a rage, was for delivering "the wretched woman," bound hand and foot, to the enemy. But the Count, who was sprung from three generations of ambassadors, and had diplomacy ingrained in him, advocated strategy. "We must persuade her," he said. Then they put their heads together.

The women drew close. The talk was carried on in low tones, and the discussion became general, each giving his opinion. But everything was done with the greatest propriety. The ladies especially had no difficulty in finding phrases full of refinement, and charming subtleties of speech in which to cloak obscene things. So meticulously guarded was their language that a stranger would not have understood a single allusion. But as the veneer of modesty which every woman possesses is but skin-deep, they began to blossom forth in this naughty enterprise, feeling secret but extravagant delight as they found themselves in their element, each taking a hand in concocting love's brew with the sensual enjoyment of a greedy cook preparing another person's supper.

The affair in the end struck them as so comical that merriment was spontaneously restored. The Count bethought himself of some rather risky jokes, which were, however, so wittily expressed that every one smiled. Loiseau, in his turn, came out with some broader pleasantries, which shocked no one. The thought so coarsely expressed by his wife was in everybody's mind: "Since it's her trade, why should the woman refuse this man more than another?" Charming Madame Carré-Lamadon even seemed to think that if she were in her place she would have less objection to him than to others.

They were a long time preparing the blockade, as though they were besieging a fortress. Each had his *rôle* assigned, with appropriate arguments

and tactics. They settled on the plan of assault, on the stratagems and surprise attacks to be used in order to force this living citadel to admit the enemy into its centre.

Cornudet, however, kept aloof, taking no part whatever in this arrangement.

So deeply absorbed were they that no one heard the Dumpling come back. The Count whispered: "Hush!" and they all looked up at her standing before them. A sudden silence followed, and the feeling of awkwardness at first prevented them from addressing her. The Countess, better versed than the others in the wiles of the social world, asked her: "Was it a pretty christening?"

The Dumpling, who was still under the influence of emotion, gave them a detailed account of everything, of how the people stood and looked, and even of the aspect of the church. "It's such a comfort to say one's prayers now and again," she added.

Up to luncheon-time the ladies confined themselves to being nice to her, with a view to giving her greater confidence in them and making her more amenable to their counsels.

As soon as they sat down to table they opened fire. A beginning was made with a vague discussion on the subject of self-sacrifice. Instances were quoted from antiquity. The story of Judith and Holofernes was followed without rhyme or reason by that of Lucretia and Sextus. Next came Cleopatra, who admitted to her bed all the enemy generals, making them serve her like

slaves. A mythical history was then unfolded, springing from the imagination of these ignorant plutocrats and describing how the Roman matrons went to Capua, where they lulled to sleep in their arms Hannibal, his generals, and his mercenary phalanxes. All the examples were given of women who had held back conquerors and made of their bodies a battlefield, a weapon, a means of victory, subduing by heroic caresses vile and loathsome beings and sacrificing their chastity for vengeance and patriotism.

They even spoke in veiled language of the Englishwoman of good family who had had herself inoculated with a horrible and contagious disease in order to transmit it to Napoleon, who was, however, miraculously saved by a sudden impotence at the hour of the fatal assignation.

All this was told with the utmost propriety and in the most sober terms, with only an occasional burst of factitious fervour intended to rouse the girl to emulation.

By the time they had finished one would have supposed that the sole part of woman in this world was the perpetual sacrifice of her person and the continued giving of herself to satisfy soldiers' lust.

The two nuns seemed to be deaf to all, pre-occupied with deep thought. The Dumpling did not utter a word.

All the afternoon they left her alone to reflect on the matter. Only, instead of calling her "madame," as they had hitherto done, they now addressed her as "mademoiselle," no one quite

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knew why, unless it was to make her go down a step from the position of respect to which she had climbed and to bring home to her her shame.

As the soup was being served Monsieur Follenvie appeared once more and repeated his formula of the previous night: "The Prussian officer wishes to know if Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset has not yet changed her mind."

The Dumpling answered curtly: "No."

At dinner the coalition weakened. Loiseau made two or three unfortunate remarks. Every one laboured hard to discover fresh instances, but without any result, when the Countess, probably without design and simply with a vague idea of showing respect for religion, put some questions to the elder of the two nuns about the outstanding events in the lives of the saints. Now many saints had done deeds which in our eyes would be crimes ; but the Church makes no difficulty about giving absolution for trespasses if they are committed for the glory of God or for the good of our fellow-men. This was a cogent argument which the Countess turned to advantage. Whether it was through one of these tacit understandings and acts of covert connivance in which all those who wear the Church's livery excel, or whether it was merely due to a happy lack of intelligence and a profitable stupidity, the old nun contributed a formidable weapon to the league. She whom they had thought a timid creature showed herself bold, fluent, and forcible. Not for her the feelers of casuistry ; her doctrine was like a sledge-hammer, her faith did not waver

for a moment, and her conscience knew no scruples. To her Abraham's sacrifice presented no difficulty, for she would have instantly slain father and mother at a command from on high. In her opinion nothing could be displeasing to the Lord if the intention was praiseworthy. The Countess, exploiting the holy authority of this unexpected ally, made her preach, as it were, on the text that "the end justifies the means."

"Then, sister," she said, "you think that all means are acceptable to God, and that He forgives the deed if the motive is pure?"

"Who can doubt it, madame? An action which is in itself blameworthy often acquires merit because of the thought which inspires it."

They continued in this strain, making out God's will, anticipating His judgments, and bringing Him into matters which in reality were scarcely His concern.

All this was cleverly and discreetly wrapped up. But every word uttered by the holy woman in the nun's coif made a breach in the courtesan's indignant resistance. Presently, the conversation taking a somewhat different turn, she of the dangling rosary spoke of the houses of her Order, of her Mother Superior, of herself, and of her darling companion, her dear Sister St. Nicéphore. They had been summoned to Havre to nurse in the hospitals hundreds of soldiers suffering from smallpox. She described these poor fellows, giving details of their disease. While they themselves were being detained on their way, through the caprice of this Prussian, a great number of

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Frenchmen might die whose lives they perhaps might have saved. Nursing soldiers was her special task. She had been in the Crimea, in Italy, and Austria. In telling her campaigning experiences, she suddenly stood revealed as one of those nuns of the fife and drum who seem destined to follow in the wake of armies, to pick up the wounded in the turmoil of the battles, and with a single word to tame the fierce spirits of strong, undisciplined soldiers more effectively than any general. She was a regular 'Rataplan' sister, whose ravaged face, potted with innumerable holes, appeared a symbol of the havoc of war.

So admirable seemed the effect she produced that no one spoke a word after her.

As soon as the meal was at an end they quickly went up to their bedrooms, to come down only very late the following morning.

Luncheon passed quietly. Time was given for the seed sown the previous night to grow and bear fruit.

In the afternoon the Countess suggested a walk. Then the Count, according to plan, took the Dumpling's arm and fell behind the others.

He spoke to her in the intimate, fatherly, and rather contemptuous way which men who lead a sober life adopt toward women of her class, calling her "My dear child." He stooped to her from the summit of his social height and his unquestioned respectability. He went straight to the root of the matter.

"Do you prefer then to keep us here exposed,

like yourself, to all the outrages which might follow upon a Prussian reverse, rather than oblige once more as you've often done in your life?"

The Dumpling made no answer.

He tried her with kindness, reasoning, and appeals to feeling. While still remaining the nobleman, he paid her court, when necessary, showered compliments upon her, and was, in short, charming. He spoke in high terms of the service which she would render them, and assured her of their gratitude. Finally, breaking suddenly into the familiar '*tu*,' he exclaimed gaily: "Take my word for it, my girl, he'll be able to boast of having enjoyed a pretty woman the like of whom he won't often get in his own country."

The Dumpling did not answer, and caught up with the rest of the party. When she returned she immediately went up to her bedroom and did not show herself again. Their anxiety was intense. What did she mean to do? If she still held out how awkward for them!

When the dinner-hour came they waited for her in vain. Monsieur Follenvie came in and announced that, as Mademoiselle Rousset felt indisposed, they might begin. They all pricked up their ears. The Count went up to the innkeeper and asked in a whisper: "Anything doing?"

"Yes."

From a sense of propriety the Count said nothing to the rest, but he nodded slightly. They all uttered a sigh of relief, and their faces lighted up. Loiseau shouted: "Here goes! I'll stand champagne if there's any to be got in this pub."

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A spasm of anguish seized Madame Loiseau when the host came back with four bottles. Every one suddenly became noisily communicative. All hearts overflowed with sprightly joy. The Count appeared to awake to the fact that Madame Carré-Lamadon was charming, while the manufacturer paid the Countess compliments. The talk was lively, brisk, and full of flashes of wit.

Suddenly Loiseau, with a troubled look, raised his hands and yelled: "Silence!" Surprised, and almost frightened already, they all became mute. He took up an attitude of attention, motioned them to keep hushed, looked up toward the ceiling, listened once more, and resumed in his ordinary voice: "All's well; be easy."

At first they were slow to seize his meaning, but soon they exchanged smiles.

After a quarter of an hour he began again the same pantomime, which he repeated several times in the course of the evening. He pretended to be addressing some one upstairs, proffering counsel with a double meaning for which he drew upon his commercial traveller's repertoire of witticisms. Sometimes he would sigh with a sorrowful expression: "Poor girl!" or else he would mutter between his teeth in a fury: "Get along with you, you damned Prussian!" At other times, when they were now thinking of something else, he would repeat several times in quivering tones: "That's enough! that's enough!" adding as if to himself: "I hope we'll see her again, and that the scoundrel won't be the death of her."

Though these jests were in deplorable taste, all

enjoyed them, and no one was shocked. Our feeling of indignation, like everything else, depends on environment, and in this case the atmosphere which had gradually been created was charged with ribaldry.

During the dessert even the women ventured on discreet sallies. They had all drunk a good deal, and their eyes were sparkling. The Count, who even in his lapses preserved his impressive look of gravity, found a much-relished parallel in the termination of the polar winter season and the joy of shipwrecked mariners who see the way to the South open once more.

Loiseau, who was well away, jumped to his feet, raising a glass of champagne. "I drink to our deliverance," he shouted. Every one rose and cheered him. Even the two nuns, pressed by the ladies, yielded and took a sip of the sparkling wine, which they had never tasted before. They declared that it was like effervescent lemonade, but that it had a finer flavour.

Loiseau summed up the situation.

"What a pity we haven't a piano! We might have got up a quadrille."

Cornudet had not uttered a word or made a sign. He seemed plunged in serious thought, and now and again he pulled furiously at his long beard, as though to make it longer still. At last, toward midnight, as the party was about to break up, Loiseau, who was reeling, gave him a sudden dig in the ribs and spluttered: "You're not very merry to-night, comrade. Why don't you say something?" Cornudet raised his head sharply,

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and, flashing a terrible look at the company, he said: "Look here, you people, you've just committed a villainy!" He rose, made his way to the door, and repeating "Villainy!" he disappeared.

The immediate effect of this was chilling. Loiseau stood dumbfounded and looked foolish. But he soon recovered his self-assurance, and suddenly became convulsed with laughter, exclaiming several times: "Sour grapes, my boy, sour grapes!" As no one understood this, he told them about "the mysteries of the passage." There was a new outburst of uncontrollable merriment. The ladies were wild with delight, while the Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed till they cried. The story seemed incredible.

"What! Are you sure? He wanted——"

"I tell you I saw it."

"And she refused——"

"Yes, because the Prussian was in the room next to her."

"Impossible!"

"I'll take my oath."

The Count choked with laughter, and the manufacturer held his sides.

"And so," continued Loiseau, "you understand why to-night he doesn't find it in the least amusing."

The three men exploded again, coughing with laughter till they were faint and out of breath.

Thereupon the party broke up. Madame Loiseau, who had an asp beneath her tongue, re-

marked to her husband as they were getting into bed that that affected little minx Carré-Lamadon had been laughing on the wrong side of her mouth all the evening. "These women, you know, when they run after uniforms, don't care whether it's a Frenchman or a Prussian. Heavens! what a shame it is!"

All that night the darkness of the corridor was alive with rustling sounds, slight noises as imperceptible as a light breeze, the pattering of bare feet, and the inaudible creaking of boards. They must have fallen asleep only very late, for streaks of light showed beneath the doors for a long time. Such are the effects of champagne. It disturbs sleep, they say.

Next day a bright winter sun made the snow dazzling. The coach, ready at last, was standing at the door. An army of white pigeons, pink-eyed with black pupils, were preening their thick plumage and stalking solemnly in front between the legs of the six horses, scattering the reeking dung in their search for sustenance.

The driver, wrapped in his sheepskin, smoked his pipe on his box. The travellers, beaming with joy, were ordering provisions for the rest of the journey. They were now only waiting for the Dumpling.

She appeared, looking a little embarrassed and ashamed. She came up nervously to her fellow-travellers, who all with one accord turned away as if they had not seen her. The Count took his wife's arm with dignity and drew her away from that defiling contact.

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The Dumpling stopped, dumbfounded ; then, plucking up all her courage, she addressed in a humble whisper a " Good-morning, madame," to the manufacturer's wife. The latter merely nodded an insolent greeting accompanied by a look of outraged virtue. They all looked busy and kept at a distance from her as though she carried infection in her skirts. Then they rushed for the coach, which she was the last to reach, walking by herself. In silence she took up once more the seat she had occupied during the first part of the journey.

They pretended neither to see nor to recognize her ; but Madame Loiseau, scrutinizing her indignantly from a distance, murmured to her husband : " I'm glad I'm not sitting next to her."

The heavy coach got under way, and the journey began again. At first no one spoke. The Dumpling did not dare to look up. She felt at one and the same time indignant with her neighbours and humiliated for having yielded to them, sullied as she was by the kisses of this Prussian, into whose arms they had cast her with their hypocrisy.

The Countess, turning toward Madame Carré-Lamadon, presently broke the painful silence.

" I think you know Madame d'Etrelles ? "

" Oh, yes ; she's a friend of mine."

" What a charming woman ! "

" Perfectly delightful ! A most exceptional woman, well educated and an artist to the fingertips ; she sings beautifully and draws perfectly."

The manufacturer conversed with the Count ;

amid the rattling of the windows a word emerged now and again—"dividend warrant—fall due—premium—mature."

Loiseau, who had filched the hotel pack of cards, greasy with five years of rubbing against dirty tables, began a game of bezique with his wife.

The nuns took up the long rosaries hanging at their waists, crossed themselves at one and the same moment, and all at once their lips began to move quickly with ever-increasing speed and a rush of muttered words as though they were engaged in a prayer race. From time to time they would kiss a sacred medal, and then, crossing themselves anew, start again their rapid and continuous babbling.

Cornudet sat still, lost in thought.

After they had been three hours on the way Loiseau gathered up the cards, saying: "I feel peckish."

His wife produced a packet tied with string, from which she drew forth a piece of cold veal. She cut it neatly into thin, firm slices, and they both began to eat.

"Suppose we do the same?" said the Countess. They agreed, and she took out the provisions bought for the two couples. They were in one of those oblong dishes with an earthenware hare on the lid, indicating that a hare-pie lay beneath. It was a savoury preparation, in which white streaks of fat crossed the brown meat of the hare mixed with other viands chopped up fine. A fine slab of Gruyère showed on its oleaginous

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surface the words "Miscellaneous News," which had come off the newspaper wrapping.

The two nuns unwrapped a piece of sausage smelling of garlic.

Cornudet thrust both his hands at once into the capacious pockets of his loose great-coat and extracted from one of them four hard-boiled eggs and from the other a crust of bread. He shelled the eggs and threw the shells into the straw at his feet. Then he began to gobble, scattering on his enormous beard bright yellow fragments of yolk, which shone there like stars.

The Dumpling, in the haste and terror of her rising, had had no time to think of anything that morning. Now she looked on with exasperation at these people quickly eating while she choked with rage. A storm of anger shook her at first, and she opened her mouth to cry out upon them, while a torrent of abuse rose to her lips; but her indignation strangled all speech.

No one gave her a look or a thought. She felt overwhelmed by the scorn of these respectable blackguards, who had first sacrificed her and then spurned her like an unclean and useless object. Then she thought of her large basketful of good things which they had greedily devoured, of her two chickens shining in their jelly, of her *pâtés*, her pears, and her four bottles of Bordeaux; and her rage gave way suddenly like a taut cord which snaps, and she felt on the verge of tears. She made violent efforts, braced herself and swallowed down the sobs as does a child; but tears rose to her eyes, glistened on her eyelashes, and then

two large drops fell and slowly rolled down her cheeks. Others followed more rapidly, flowing like drops of water which trickle from a rock, and falling in regular succession upon the swelling curve of her bosom. She sat erect and looked straight before her, her face set and pale, hoping that no one would see her.

But the Countess noticed her and nudged her husband to attract his attention. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "Well, what about it? It's not my fault."

Madame Loiseau, with a silent laugh of triumph, whispered: "She is weeping for her shame."

The two nuns had begun their prayers once more after wrapping up the remainder of their sausage in a piece of paper.

Cornudet, who was digesting his eggs, stretched out his long legs under the bench opposite, leaned back with folded arms, smiled like a man who has thought of a good joke, and began to whistle the *Marseillaise*.

A cloud descended on every face. It was clear that the revolutionary song was not to his neighbours' taste. They became nervous and irritated, and looked like dogs ready to howl at the sound of a barrel-organ. He noticed it, but went on nevertheless. Sometimes he even hummed the words:

*Amour Sacré de la Patrie,
Conduis, soutiens, nos bras vengeurs,
Liberté, liberté chérie.
Combats avec tes défenseurs!*

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The coach went faster as the snow became hardened. All the way to Dieppe, during the long and dreary hours of their journey, at night-fall, and subsequently in the deep gloom, above the jolting of the vehicle, with savage resolution he kept up his monotonous, vindictive whistling, forcing their jaded and exasperated brains to follow the song from beginning to end, to recall every word and fit it into the tune.

The Dumpling never ceased to weep, and now and again, in a pause between two couplets, a sob which she had not been able to repress would escape into the darkness.

THE CHAIRMENDER

It was the opening of the shooting-season at the house of the Marquis de Bertrans. Dinner was over ; eleven sportsmen, eight ladies, all of them still youthful, and the doctor of the district were seated round the great lighted table, decorated with fruit and flowers. They began to talk of love, and a great discussion ensued, that ever-recurring discussion as to whether true love is possible once only or many times.

Examples were quoted of people who had only had one love affair ; other examples were given of persons who had loved often and passionately. The men, in general, held that passion, like disease, can attack the same person many times, attack fatally even should he meet with some obstacle.

Although this aspect of the subject was incontestable, the women, whose opinions rested on poetry rather than on observation, affirmed that love, true love, the great love, could descend but once upon an individual, that such love was like a thunderbolt, and that a heart once touched by it remained ever after so emptied, ravaged, seared, that no other powerful feeling, not even a dream, could be born again within it.

The Marquis, having loved often, keenly combated this belief. " I assure you that one can

love many times, with all one's heart and with all one's soul. You tell me of people who have killed themselves for love, as proof of the impossibility of a second passion. I answer that had they not committed the blunder of suicide, which took from them all chance of relapse, they would have recovered ; they would have begun again and again till their natural death. Lovers are like drunkards : those who have drunk drink again ; those who have loved will love again ; it is a matter of temperament."

They chose as arbiter the doctor, an old Parisian practitioner retired to the country, and begged him to give his opinion ; but actually he had none. "As the Marquis says, it is an affair of temperament. As for me, I have known of a passion that lasted for fifty-five years, without a day of respite, and which ended only with death."

The Marchioness clapped her hands. "How beautiful, and what a dream to be loved thus ! What happiness to live for fifty-five years wrapped round by such deep and ardent affection ! How happy and how full of joy in life must the man thus adored have been !"

The doctor smiled. "Indeed, madame, you are not mistaken about one point : that the beloved object was a man. You know him ; it was M. Chouquet, the chemist of the town. As for the woman, you know her too. She was the old chairmender who used to come to the castle every year ; but I will explain myself more clearly."

The enthusiasm of the women had subsided.

Their disgusted faces said, "Faugh!" As though it were not meet that love should visit any but refined and distinguished people, alone worthy of the interest of the well-bred!

The doctor continued: "Three months ago I was called to the deathbed of this old woman; she had arrived, the evening before, in the cart which was her house, drawn by the wretched hack horse which you have seen, and accompanied by two great black dogs, her friends and guardians. The parish priest was already there; she appointed us her legal executors, and, in order to reveal to us the significance of her last wishes, she told us her life-story. I know of nothing more strange or more touching. Her father was a chairmender, and her mother also; she had never lived in a house built on solid ground. As a small child she had wandered about in rags, verminous and filthy.

"They stayed on the outskirts of villages. By the hedge-sides they would unharness the cart while the horse grazed and the dog slept, his nose on his paws; and the little one would play about on the grass while the father and mother, under the shade of the elms, by the roadside, would repair all the old seats of the hamlet. There was little conversation in this itinerant dwelling. After the few necessary words to settle who should make the round of the houses crying out the well-known 'Chairs to mend,' they would begin to plait the straw, sitting opposite each other or side by side; when the child strayed too far, or tried to make friends with some village urchin, the

angry voice of her father would recall her: 'Will you come back, you rascal!'

"They were the only words of affection that she heard. When she grew older she was sent to collect the damaged chair-bottoms; then she would scrape acquaintance here and there with village boys, but now it was the parents of her new friends who roughly recalled their offspring: 'Will you come here, scamps! Just let me catch you talking to ragamuffins!'

"Often the little boys would throw stones at her. The coppers given her by ladies she hoarded with care.

"Passing one day through this part of the world when she was eleven years old, she came across the little Chouquet boy, behind the cemetery, crying because a comrade had stolen two sous from him. These tears on the part of a gentleman's child, one of those whom in her foolish little waif's mind she had imagined to be always contented and happy, overwhelmed her; she drew near, and when she learnt the cause of his trouble she poured into his hand all her savings—seven sous—which he naturally took, drying his tears. Then, wild with delight, she was emboldened to kiss him. Being absorbed in the contemplation of his money, he made no resistance, and she, finding herself neither rebuffed nor beaten, began again, clasping him in her arms, kissing him heartily, and then running away.

"What process went on in the mind of the waif? Had she taken a fancy to this youngster

because she had sacrificed to him her vagrant's fortune, or because she had given him her first loving kiss? The mystery is the same whether with children or grown-ups.

"For months she dreamed of this corner of the cemetery and of this boy. On the chance of seeing him again, she stole from her parents, scraping up a sou here and a sou there, on the chairmending or on the provisions she went to buy. On her return she had two francs in her pocket, but she could only catch a glimpse of the little chemist, looking very clean, behind the windows of his father's shop, between a crimson bowl and a tapeworm specimen. Charmed, excited, enraptured by the splendour of the coloured water and the glittering glass, she loved him all the more dearly.

"She treasured the unfading memory of him in her heart, and when she met him again, the year after, playing marbles with his comrades behind the school, she threw herself upon him, kissing him so vehemently that he began to howl with fear. Then to pacify him she gave him her money—three francs twenty centimes—a real fortune, which he looked at with wide-open eyes. He took it and allowed her to caress him as much as she liked.

"For four years longer she poured into his hands all her savings, which he pocketed conscientiously in exchange for so many kisses. Once it was thirty sous, once two francs, once twelve sous (she wept for sorrow, dismay, and humiliation, but it had been a bad year), and the last time

it was five francs, a great round coin which made him laugh with delight.

"He had become her only interest ; and he awaited her return with a certain amount of impatience, running to meet her when he saw her, making the little girl's heart beat with joy.

"Then he disappeared ; they had sent him to school, as she discovered by adroit questionings. Then with much manœuvring she tried to change her parents' route, making them pass here at holiday times ; she succeeded, but only after a year of stratagem.

"Two years had thus passed since she had seen him, and he was so changed, so tall, handsome, and imposing in his tunic with gilt buttons, that she could scarcely recognize him. He pretended not to see her, and proudly passed her by. For two days she wept, and after that continued to suffer without respite.

"Every year she returned, passing him without daring even to greet him, while he did not deign even to glance at her.

"She loved him to distraction.

" ' Doctor,' she said to me, ' I had no eyes for any other man ; in fact, no others existed for me.'

"Her parents died, and she carried on their trade, but she had two dogs instead of one, two terrifying dogs that no one would have dared to confront.

"One day she was returning to the village where her affections lay when she saw a young woman coming out of the Chouquets' shop, arm

in arm with her beloved ; it was his wife : they were married !

“ That very evening she threw herself into the pond in the town-hall square.

“ A belated drunkard pulled her out and carried her to the chemist’s shop. Chouquet’s son came downstairs in his dressing-gown to attend to her, and, without appearing to recognize her, took her clothes off, rubbed her, and then said in a hard voice : ‘ You are mad ! You must not play the fool like this.’ That was sufficient to cure her. He had spoken to her ! It made her happy for a long time. He would accept no remuneration for curing her, though she eagerly offered to pay.

“ Thus her life passed. She mended chairs, dreaming of Chouquet. Every year she had a sight of him through his windows ; she took to buying small supplies of remedies from him ; in this way she could get near him, talk to him, and give him more money.

“ As I said at first, she died this spring.

“ After telling me all this sad story, she begged me to hand over to him whom she had loved so patiently all the savings of a lifetime, for she had worked solely for him, she said, even going short of food in order to lay by, and to make sure that he should think of her, once at least, when she was dead. So she gave me two thousand, three hundred, and twenty-seven francs. I left the twenty-seven francs with the priest for the funeral and took the rest away, after she had breathed her last.

“The following day I went to the Chouquets’; they were finishing luncheon, sitting opposite each other, fat, red, consequential, and content, and redolent of the products of the chemist’s shop.

“They made me sit down and offered me a ‘Kirsch,’ which I accepted. Then I began my discourse in a voice charged with emotion, fully expecting that they would weep.

“As soon as he understood that he had been loved by this vagabond, this chairmender, this scum of the high-roads, Chouquet bristled with indignation, as though she had stolen from him his reputation, the esteem of respectable people, his personal honour, something delicate and more precious than life itself. His wife, as exasperated as he was, could only repeat over and over again: ‘That beggar-woman! that beggar-woman!’ He had got up and was striding rapidly up and down behind the table, his skull-cap askew over his ear. He stammered out: ‘Can you understand it, doctor? It’s one of those horrible things that happen to men! What can one do? Oh, had I only known it while she was alive, I would have had her arrested by the police and flung into prison, and she should never have come out again, I’ll answer for that.’ I was astounded at the result of my well-meant action. I had no idea what to do, nor what to say, but I had to fulfil my mission, so I went on: ‘She bade me give you her whole savings, which amount to two thousand, three hundred francs. As what I have told you seems very distasteful to you, perhaps

the best thing to do would be to give the money to the poor.' The man and woman looked at me, transfixed with amazement. I drew the money out of my pocket, a wretched collection of coins of every country and of every mint, gold and coppers mixed. Then I asked: 'What is your decision?'

"Madame Chouquet spoke first. 'Well, as it was this woman's last wish . . . I suppose we can hardly refuse.' The husband somewhat shamefacedly replied: 'We could always buy something for the children with it.' I answered drily: 'As you wish!' He rejoined: 'Oh, well, let's have it, as she asked you to do this; we can always find some means of employing it for some good work.'

"I handed over the money, bowed, and went away. The next morning Chouquet came to find me and said brusquely: 'That—that woman has left her cart here. . . . What shall you do with the cart?'

" 'Nothing! Take it if you wish.'

" 'Good! That's just what I want. I shall make a shed for my kitchen-garden with it.'

"He was going off when I called him back. 'She left her old horse and her two dogs as well. Do you want them too?'

"He paused, astonished. 'Oh, no, of course not. What should I do with them? Make what use you like of them!' And he laughed. Then he put out his hand, which I shook.

"After all, it is not possible for the doctor and the chemist of the same district to be enemies.

THE CHAIRMENDER

“I kept the dogs for myself, and the priest, who has a large yard, took the horse. Chouquet uses the cart as a shed, and he has bought five railway bonds with the money.

“That is the only case of deep love that I have met in my life.”

The doctor was silent.

Then the Marquise, with tears in her eyes, sighed. “Undoubtedly,” she said, “women are the only ones who know how to love!”

VENDETTA

PAOLO SAVERINI's widow lived alone with her son in a humble little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a spur of the mountain, and in places actually overhanging the sea, looks across the rock-strewn straits to the Sardinian coast, lower down. At its feet, on the other side, a cutting in the cliff, like a gigantic corridor, encircles it almost completely, and serves it as a port, enabling the little Italian and Sardinian fishing boats, and the broken-winded old steamer plying fortnightly between it and Ajaccio, to reach the first houses, after winding in and out between two rugged walls.

On the white hillside the cluster of houses form a patch of still more dazzling whiteness. They look like the nests of wild birds, clinging as they do to the rock and dominating those terrible straits where ships scarcely ever dare venture. The barren coast, where hardly a blade of grass grows, is for ever being lashed and worried by the wind, which sweeps down the narrow passage, ravaging the banks on either side. Trails of white sea-foam cling to the black rocks which jut out everywhere above the surface of the waves and look like rags tossing up and down on the water.

The widow Saverini's house, welded into the very edge of the cliff, looked out through its three

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windows upon this wild and desolate scene. She lived there alone with her son Antoine and their dog Frisky—a great, gaunt bitch with a long, coarse coat, of the sheep-dog breed, who accompanied the young man when he went hunting.

One evening, after a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously stabbed by Nicolas Ravolati, who escaped that same night to Sardinia.

When the body of her child was brought back and handed over to the old woman by passers-by, she did not weep, but after standing motionless, in long contemplation of the corpse, she stretched her wrinkled hand over it and swore to carry on a vendetta for him. She would have no one to stay with her, but shut herself in with the dead body and the dog, who had started howling. The animal kept the howl up without pause, standing at the foot of the bed with its head pointing stiffly toward its master, and its tail between its legs. It was as motionless as the old woman, who was now bending over the body, gazing at it fixedly and in silence while her tears fell fast.

Lying there on his back, clad in a rough cloth jacket, which was pierced and torn at the breast, the young man seemed to be sleeping ; but there were bloodstains all over him, on his shirt, which had been torn off by those who had first tended him, on his waistcoat, his trousers, his face and hands. His beard and hair were matted with blood. The old mother began to talk to him, and at the sound of her voice the dog was silent.

“ There, there—you shall be avenged, my little one—my poor boy—sleep on ; you shall be

avenged. I tell you, you have Mother's promise, and you know she always keeps her word." And slowly leaning over him, she pressed her cold lips to those of her dead son.

Frisky started to howl again, uttering a long, monotonous, heartrending wail.

The two of them, woman and dog, remained there until morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried next day, and soon there was no more talk of him in Bonifacio. He had left behind him neither brothers nor near kinsmen, not one man to carry out the vendetta. Only his old mother thought about it. On the other side of the straits she could see all day long a spot of white on the coast. It was the little Sardinian village of Longosardo, where the Corsican bandits took refuge when the police were hard upon their heels. They form practically the entire population of this hamlet lying opposite their native coast, and here they wait for the moment when they can return to the 'bush.' It was in this village, as she well knew, that Nicolas Ravolati had taken refuge.

Sitting at her window, quite alone all day long, she would look over yonder and dream of vengeance. What could she do, weak and near her end as she was, with no one to aid her? But she had promised; she had taken an oath on the dead body. She could neither forget nor delay. What was she to do? She could not sleep at night; all rest and peace of mind abandoned her; persistently she sought a method. The dog drowsed at her feet, now and again raising its head to give

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forth a howl. Now that its master was no longer there, it would often howl thus, as though calling to him, as though its canine soul were inconsolable, cherishing an undying memory.

One night, when Frisky started whining, the mother had a sudden idea, such an idea as might occur to a vindictive and ferocious savage. She brooded over it until morning; then, rising at dawn, she betook herself to the church. Prostrate on the hard floor, she prayed in utter submission to God, beseeching Him to help and sustain her, to grant to her poor worn body the strength necessary to avenge her son. Then she returned home. In her yard she had an old staved-in cask, into which dripped the water from the eaves; she turned it over and emptied it, then fastened it to the ground with stakes and stones, after which she chained Frisky to this kennel and went into the house. She now began to walk ceaselessly up and down her room, her eyes constantly fixed on the Sardinian coast. He, the murderer, was over yonder. The dog howled all day and all night. In the morning the old woman took it some water in a bowl, but nothing else, no soup, no bread. Another day passed. Frisky slept, exhausted. On the day following its eyes were gleaming, its coat bristling, and it tugged desperately at its chain. Still the old woman gave it nothing to eat. The animal was frantic and barked hoarsely. Another night passed. Then, at daybreak, Mother Saverini went round to her neighbour's and begged for two bundles of straw. She fetched some old

clothes that her husband had once worn, and stuffed them with straw in imitation of a human body ; planting a stick in the ground in front of Frisky's kennel, she tied the scarecrow on top of it, so as to look as if it were standing there. Then she modelled the head out of a bundle of old linen. The dog looked in astonishment at this man of straw, and stopped barking, in spite of its devouring hunger.

Next, the old woman went to the pork butcher's and bought a long piece of black sausage. When she returned she lighted a wood fire in her yard, close to the kennel, and roasted her sausage. Frisky, driven frantic, leapt about and foamed at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the gridiron, her stomach full of the smoke that rose from it.

Then the mother took the smoking sausage and made it into a tie for the straw-man. She took a long time fastening it round his neck, as though she wanted to stuff it well into him. When she had finished she unchained the dog.

With one terrible leap the beast reached the dummy's throat, and putting her paws on its shoulders, began to tear it to bits. She would fall back with a piece of her victim in her mouth, then spring up again, bury her fangs in the strings, tear off some morsels of sausage, fall back again, and leap up again in a fury. She snatched the face away with huge bites, and tore the whole neck to shreds. The old woman looked on with shining eyes, motionless and silent. Then she chained the beast up once more, left her without

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food for two more days, and repeated the strange performance.

She spent three months accustoming the dog to this kind of contest, to this conquest of a meal by the use of its fangs. She no longer kept it chained, but with a gesture set it on the dummy. She had taught it to tear and devour him even when there was no food concealed beneath his neck. Afterward, as a reward, she would give it the sausage she had cooked for it. The moment it caught sight of the man the dog would quiver and then look at its mistress, who would raise her hand, crying in a strident voice :
“ At him ! ”

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When she judged the time ripe, Mother Sav-rini went to confession and made her communion one Sunday morning, with ecstatic fervour. Then she put on men's clothes, and, looking like a poor old tramp, she bargained with a Sardinian fisherman to take her, together with her dog, to the other side of the strait. In a cloth bag she carried a large piece of sausage. Frisky had eaten nothing for two days. The old woman kept on letting the dog smell the appetizing food to excite it.

They arrived at Longosardo. The Corsican went limping into a baker's shop and asked where Nicolas Ravolati lived. He had taken up his old trade of carpentering once more, and was working alone in the back of his shop.

The old woman pushed open the door and called :

“ Hi, Nicolas ! ”

He turned round. She loosed the dog, crying :
"At him! at him! Eat him!"

The maddened beast sprang forward and seized the man's throat. He flung his arms round the dog and fell to the ground. For a few minutes he lay writhing and kicking ; then he was still, while Frisky buried her head in his neck, tearing it away bit by bit.

Two neighbours sitting in their doorways clearly remembered seeing an old tramp go away with a black dog, which was chewing, as it went, some brown object given it by its master.

By evening the old woman had returned to her home. That night she slept soundly.

MADEMOISELLE PERLE

WHAT a strange idea that was of mine, truly, when on that evening I chose Mlle Perle for my Queen !

I go every year to celebrate the Epiphany with my old friend Chantal. My father, whose most intimate friend he was, used to take me there when I was a child. I have continued to go, and shall no doubt continue as long as I live and there is a Chantal in this world.

The Chantals, be it said, lead a peculiar existence. They live in Paris as if they inhabited a remote town in the provinces. They possess, near the Observatoire, a house in its own little garden. There they are as snug as in a country retreat. Of Paris, of the real Paris, they know nothing, suspect nothing. They are so far away !

Yet now and again they journey into town, a long journey ! Mme Chantal goes forth to 're-stock,' as they say in the family. This is how they go to re-stock.

Mlle Perle, who holds the keys of the kitchen presses (for the linen presses are under the care of the lady of the house)—Mlle Perle lets it be known that the sugar is nearing its end, that the tinned goods are exhausted, that the coffee bag is nearly empty.

Thus forewarned against famine, Mme Chantal holds an inspection of all remainders, taking notes in a pocket-book. Then, when she has put down many figures, she gives herself up first to long calculations, and then to long discussions with Mlle Perle. In due course they come to an agreement, and decide upon the quantities of every item of which a three months' supply shall be laid in : sugar, rice, prunes, coffee, jam, tins of green peas, of haricot beans, of lobster, salt and smoked fish, etc., etc.

After which a day is fixed for the purchases, and they go off in a cab, a cab with a luggage-rail, to a big store across the bridges, in the new quarters. Mme Chantal and Mlle Perle take this journey together, mysteriously, and return at the dinner-hour, tired out, although still excited, and jolted in the cab, the top of which is covered with parcels and bags, like a removal van.

For the Chantals all that part of Paris which lies on the other bank of the Seine constitutes the 'new quarters' ; quarters inhabited by a peculiar population, noisy and hardly reputable, that spends its days in dissipation, its nights in pleasure-seeking, and casts its money to the winds. From time to time, however, the girls are taken to the theatre, to the Opéra-Comique or to the Théâtre-Français, when the play has the recommendation of M. Chantal's daily paper.

The girls are now nineteen and seventeen years old, two handsome girls, tall and blooming, very well brought up, too well brought up, so well brought up that they pass unnoticed like two

pretty dolls. The idea would never occur to me to give any attention or to pay my court to the Milles Chantal; one hardly dares to speak to them, they seem so immaculate; one is almost afraid to lift one's hat to them, lest it be a presumption.

As for the father, he is a delightful man, well educated, very open, very hearty; but he values repose, quiet, tranquillity before everything else, and has thus contributed not a little to the mummifying of his family, in order to live as he likes best, in dead stagnation. He is a great reader, fond of talking, and emotional. As he has never been rubbed against, jostled, or knocked about by his fellow-men, he has become very thin-skinned—in the moral sense, of course. The least thing excites him, agitates him, makes him suffer.

The Chantals know a few people, however, but a very restricted circle, carefully chosen from their neighbourhood. They also exchange two or three visits a year with relatives who live far from Paris.

As for me, I go and dine with them on the 15th of August, which is the Festival of the Assumption, and on Twelfth Night. This is part of my duties, like Easter Communion for Catholics.

On the 15th of August a few friends are invited, but on Twelfth Night I am the only stranger at their table.

II

This year then, as in other years, I went to dine with the Chantals on Twelfth Night. As is my custom, I embraced M. Chantal, Mme Chantal, and Mlle Perle, and bowed low to Mlles Louise and Pauline. I was questioned on all sorts of things, on life in town, on politics ; I was asked what the public thought of our colonial policy and of the Government.

Mme Chantal, a stout lady whose ideas all appear to me to be square, like hewn stones, usually winds up any political discussion with the dictum : " All that is bad, and we shall reap as we are sowing."

Why have I always imagined that Mme Chantal's ideas are square ? I don't know ; but everything she says takes that shape in my mind : a square, a big square with four symmetrical angles. There are other people whose ideas always seem to me to be round and to roll along like hoops. As soon as they have begun a sentence on anything, it starts to roll, and away it goes, and out come ten, twenty, fifty round ideas, big and small, which I see running after each other, as far as the eye can reach. Other people, again, have ideas which are pointed . . . Well, well, no matter.

We sat down to table as usual, and dinner ended without anything having been said that is worthy of note.

At dessert the Twelfth-cake was brought in. Now, every year M. Chantal is King. Whether

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this is due to sheer luck or to a family understanding, I cannot say, but he invariably finds the bean in his piece of cake, and he proclaims Mme Chantal Queen.

What was therefore my amazement on feeling in a mouthful of *brioche* something hard on which I nearly broke a tooth! I gently extracted this object from my mouth, and beheld a tiny porcelain doll, no larger than a bean. Surprise made me say "Ah!" Everybody looked at me, and Chantal exclaimed, clapping his hands:

"It's Gaston! It's Gaston! Long live the King! Long live the King!"

Everybody repeated in chorus: "Long live the King!" I flushed up to the ears, as people often do, without reason, when they are made to feel rather foolish. I remained with downcast eyes, holding this atom of porcelain between two fingers, trying to laugh, and at a loss what to do or what to say. Chantal proceeded: "Now you must choose a Queen."

Then I was panic-stricken. In the space of a second a thousand thoughts, a thousand surmises passed through my mind. Did they want to make me name one of the Misses Chantal? Was this a dodge to make me say which one I preferred? Was it a gentle, a slight, an imperceptible move on the part of the parents toward a possible marriage? This idea of marriage constantly haunts houses where there are grown-up girls, it assumes all sorts of shapes and disguises, seizes on all sorts of devices. I was overcome by an agonizing dread of committing myself, and also by extreme

shyness, when faced with the obstinately correct and close bearing of Mlles Louise and Pauline.

To choose one of them and ignore the other seemed to me as difficult as choosing between two drops of water ; then again, the fear of venturing into an entanglement in which I should drift toward marriage in spite of myself, gently, through incidents as discreet, commonplace, and unexciting as this insignificant royalty, this fear disturbed me dreadfully. Suddenly an inspiration came to me, and I handed the symbolical doll to Mlle Perle.

At first every one was surprised ; then my delicacy and discretion were no doubt appreciated, for they applauded frantically, and shouted : “ Long live the Queen ! Long live the Queen ! ”

As for the poor old maid, she had quite lost countenance ; taken aback, she trembled, and stammered : “ No, no ! Not me, please, not me, please ! ”

Then, for the first time in my life, I looked at Mlle Perle and wondered who she might be. I was accustomed to seeing her in that house, as we see the old tapestry arm-chairs on which we have sat from childhood without ever taking notice of them. One fine day, for some unknown reason, perhaps because a sunbeam lights on the seat, we suddenly say : “ Why, that’s a very uncommon piece of furniture ! ” and we discover that the wood was worked by an artist, and that the covering is remarkable.

I had never taken any notice of Mlle Perle.

She was a member of the Chantal family, that was all I knew ; but how ? What was her standing ? She was a tall, thin person who kept in the background, but who was not insignificant. She was treated in a friendly way, better than a house-keeper, not so well as a relative.

And now, of a sudden, I became aware of many little things to which I had never given attention hitherto. Mme Chantal called her " Perle " ; the young ladies, " Mlle Perle " ; and Chantal called her only " Mademoiselle," with more deference perhaps.

I began to observe her. How old was she ? Forty ? Yes, forty. Not such a very old maid, but she made herself look old. I suddenly realized this. She did her hair, dressed, and adorned herself ridiculously, and nevertheless was not ridiculous, there was in her so much simple and natural grace, a grace which she was careful to veil and to hide.

Truly a peculiar person ! How was it that I had never looked at her more closely ? The way she did her hair was grotesque, with little, old-fashioned curls that were really too funny. And under this Madonna-like head of hair, which she had clung to, I saw a broad, calm forehead, furrowed by two deep wrinkles, telling of long hours of sadness ; then two blue eyes, large and gentle, and so shy, so timorous, so humble ! Two lovely eyes which had remained ingenuous, full of girlish wonder, of youthful feeling, and also of the sorrows which had filled them, and softened them, but left them undimmed.

Her whole face was refined and discreet ; one of those faces which have faded without having been worn out or withered by the fatigues or the great emotions of life.

What a pretty mouth ! and what pretty teeth ! But it seemed as if she dare not smile.

Suddenly I compared her with Mme Chantal. Indeed, Mlle Perle was better-looking, a hundred times better-looking, with more refinement, nobility, and distinction. I was amazed with my observations. Our glasses were being filled with champagne. I held out mine to my Queen, and proposed her health in a nicely turned compliment.

I saw that she would have liked to hide her face in her napkin ; then, as she put her lips to the clear wine, everybody cried : " The Queen ! The Queen ! " She turned quite red, and choked. Every one laughed, but it was obvious that she was held in great affection.

III

As soon as dinner was over Chantal took my arm. This was the hour sacred to his cigar. When he was alone he went and enjoyed it in the street ; when he had some one in to dinner, the men went up to the billiard-room, and he played a game while he smoked.

That evening they had even lighted a fire in the billiard-room, in honour of the Epiphany. My old friend took up his cue, a favourite one, which he chalked with great care ; then he said :

" You begin, my lad ! "

He treated me as a boy, although I was twenty-five, but then he had known me since my childhood.

So I started the game ; I made a few cannons, and missed a few others ; but as I could not get the thought of Mlle Perle out of my mind, I suddenly asked :

“ I say, M. Chantal, is Mlle Perle related to you ? ”

He stopped playing, much astonished, and looked at me.

“ What, don’t you know ? Are you not acquainted with Mlle Perle’s history ? ”

“ No.”

“ Didn’t your father ever tell you about it ? ”

“ No.”

“ Well, that is funny ! Indeed, that’s too funny ! Why, it’s quite a romance ! ”

He was silent, then went on :

“ And if you knew how strange it is that you should ask me that to-day, Epiphany Day ! ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Ah ! why ? Listen. It was just forty-one years ago, forty-one years ago on this very day, Epiphany Day. We were living then at Roüy-le-Tors, on the ramparts ; but I must first tell you all about the house, that you may understand. Roüy is built on a hill-side, or rather on a crest which overlooks extensive meadow-land. There we had a house with a fine terraced garden, supported by the old fortification walls. So that the house was in the town, on the street, while the garden dominated the plain.

“ There was also a garden door opening on to the country, at the foot of a secret stair, built in the thickness of the walls, as you read about in novels. A road passed this door, which was provided with a huge bell, for the peasants, to save themselves a long circuit, brought their provisions that way. You see how we were situated, don't you? Well, that year, on Twelfth Night, it had been snowing for a week. The end of the world seemed to have come. When we went to the ramparts to look at the plain, our very souls were chilled at the sight of that vast expanse of country, white, uniformly white, frozen, and shining like a glaze. It looked as if God had packed up the earth in paper to have it removed to the garret where old worlds are put away. A depressing sight, I assure you.

“ The family lived all together at that time, and we were a large party : my father, mother, uncle, and aunt, my two brothers, and my four girl-cousins. They were pretty little girls ; I married the youngest. Of all that household only three have survived : my wife, myself, and my sister-in-law, who lives at Marseilles. By Jove ! how members of a family do drop away ! It gives me the shivers to think of it. I was fifteen then, since I am now fifty-six.

“ Well, we were going to celebrate Twelfth Night, and we were a jolly party, very jolly. Everybody was awaiting dinner in the drawing-room, when my eldest brother, Jacques, suddenly said :

“ ‘ A dog has been howling in the plain for the

last ten minutes ; it must be some poor stray animal.'

"He had hardly spoken when the garden bell sounded. It had a deep sound like a church bell, which made us think of the dead. A shiver went through every one of us. My father called the man-servant, and bade him go and see who it was.

"We waited in complete silence, thinking of the snow which covered the whole ground. When the man came back he asserted that he had seen nothing. The dog continued to howl, without ceasing, and its voice came always from the same spot.

"We sat down to table, but we were a little excited, especially the young people. All went well until the roast, when suddenly the bell started again, and rang three times in succession, three loud, long-drawn clangs, which thrilled us to our finger-tips, and made us gasp. We sat looking at each other, with poised forks, still listening, and seized with an uncanny sort of fear.

"At last my mother spoke :

" 'It is strange that they have been so long in coming back ; do not go alone, Baptiste, one of the gentlemen will accompany you.'

"My uncle François rose. He was a sort of Hercules, very proud of his strength, and absolutely fearless. My father said to him : 'Take a gun. There is no saying what it may be.'

"But my uncle merely took a walking-stick and went out at once with the servant. The rest of us remained, all feeling very nervous, neither eating nor speaking. My father tried to reassure us.

“ ‘ You will see,’ he said, ‘ that it is some beggar or some wayfarer lost in the snow. After ringing a first time, as we did not open at once, he tried to find his way, then failing to do so, he has come back to our door.’ ”

“ My uncle’s absence seemed to last for an hour. He returned at last, furious and swearing. ‘ Nothing, confound it ! It’s some practical joker. Nothing but that cursed dog, howling about a hundred yards from the ramparts. If I had taken a gun I should have shot it to stop its noise.’ ”

“ We resumed our dinner, but every one remained anxious ; we felt that all was not over, that something was bound to happen, that presently the bell would sound again.

“ And sound it did, just as the Twelfth-cake was being cut. All the men rose together. Uncle François, who had been drinking champagne, declared that he was going to brain ‘ him,’ and with such fury that my mother and my aunt rushed forward to restrain him.

“ My father, although very calm and rather helpless—he was lame since he had been thrown from his horse and had broken his leg—also declared that he wanted to know what it was, and that he would go. My brothers, aged eighteen and twenty, ran for their guns ; and as no one paid much attention to me, I got hold of a saloon rifle and prepared to accompany the party.

“ We started at once. My father and uncle led the way, with Baptiste, who was carrying a lantern. My brothers Jacques and Paul followed, and I came behind, in spite of the entreaties of my

mother, who remained on the doorstep with her sister and my cousins.

“For the last hour the snow had been falling again, and the trees were laden with it. The firs bent under this heavy and livid covering ; they looked like white pyramids, like huge sugar-loaves. Through the grey curtain of tiny flakes falling closely one could hardly see the smaller shrubs, standing ghostly in the darkness. The snow, indeed, was falling so thick that nothing was visible more than ten feet away. But the lantern cast a great light in front of us.

“When we began to go down the winding stairs built in the wall, I felt really frightened. I imagined that some one was following me, was about to grab me by the shoulders and to carry me off ; I felt much inclined to turn back, but as I should have had to cross the whole garden again I did not dare.

“I heard them open the door leading to the plain ; then my uncle let out another oath :

““Confound him ! He’s gone again ! Let me only see his shadow, and I shan’t miss him.”

“It was uncanny to see the plain, or rather to feel it there in front, for it could not be seen ; we looked into an endless veil of snow, above, below, in front, to right, to left, everywhere.

“My uncle went on : ‘Listen, there’s that dog howling again ; I’ll show him what kind of a shot I am. That will be something, anyway.’

“But my father, who was a kindly man, said : ‘Far better go and fetch the poor beast ; it is howling with hunger, unless it is barking for

help ; it is calling like a man in distress. Come along ! ’

“ And we set out through that curtain of snow, through the thick and continuous fall, through that spray which filled the night and the air, which moved, hovered, fell, and froze our flesh as it melted, froze it as it would have burnt it, with a keen and swift sting every time those little white flakes touched the skin. We sank to the knees in this cold, soft, and clammy substance, and we had to lift our feet very high in order to advance. As we proceeded the dog’s voice became clear and louder. My uncle cried : ‘ There it is ! ’

“ We stopped to observe it, as is wise when you meet an enemy in the night.

“ I could see nothing, so I joined the others, and caught sight of it. The dog was fearful and fantastic to look at ; it was a big black, shaggy-haired and wolf-headed sheep-dog, and it stood on its four paws, at the very end of the long gleam of white which the lantern cast on the snow. It remained motionless, silent now, and looked at us.

“ My uncle said : ‘ It’s strange that it neither comes to meet us nor draws back. I think I’ll have a shot at it.’

“ My father answered in a firm voice : ‘ No, we must secure it.’

“ Then my brother Jacques added : ‘ But it isn’t alone. There’s something beside it.’

“ There was indeed something behind it, something grey which we could not distinguish. We advanced again cautiously. On seeing us draw

near the dog sat down on its haunches. It did not look vicious, but rather seemed glad that it had succeeded in attracting people. My father went straight forward and patted it. The dog licked his hands. Then we saw that it was fastened to the wheel of a little cart, a sort of toy-cart, entirely wrapped up in three or four woollen blankets. We removed these wrappings carefully, and as Baptiste brought his lantern to the opening of the cart, which was made like a kennel on wheels, we saw inside it a little sleeping child.

“We were so amazed that we could not utter a word. My father was the first to regain his self-possession, and as he had a big heart and was inclined to be quixotic, he held out his hand over the roof of the cart and said :

“ ‘ Poor little waif, you shall be one of us.’

“And he bade my brother Jacques wheel our find in front of the procession.

“My father went on, thinking aloud :

“ ‘ Some love-child whose poor mother has come to ring at my door on this Twelfth Night, in memory of the Child-God.’

“He stopped again, and with all his strength he shouted four times through the night, to the four quarters of the heavens : ‘ We have taken it in !’

“Then, laying his hand on his brother’s shoulder, he murmured : ‘ What if you had fired on the dog, François ? . . .’

“My uncle returned no answer, but in the darkness, with an ample gesture, he made the sign of

the cross, for he was very religious, in spite of his braggadocio.

“The dog had been loosed, and was following us.

“Oh ! but it was pretty to see us arrive home again ! There was first the difficult hoisting of the cart up the rampart stair ; this was accomplished, however, and we wheeled it right into the hall. Mother *was* funny, so pleased and so flustered ! And my four little cousins—the youngest was six—were like four hens round a nest. At last the child, still asleep, was taken out of the cart. It was a girl, about six weeks old. And in her swaddling clothes were found ten thousand francs in gold ; yes, ten thousand francs ! which my father invested to constitute a dowry for her. So she was no pauper’s child.

“Our conjectures were endless, but we never learned anything about her ; we could find out nothing, positively nothing. Not even the dog was identified by any one ; it was a stranger to our part of the country. But at all events he or she who had rung three times at our door knew my parents well to have chosen them.

“So that is how Mlle Perle, at the age of six weeks, entered the Chantal household.

“It was only later indeed that we called her Mlle Perle. She was baptized under the names of Marie Simonne Claire, and Claire was to be her surname.

“It was a queer return to the dining-room, I assure you, with that babe, now awake, looking round at the people and the lights with her dim

and unsteady blue eyes. We sat down to table again, and the cake was divided. I was King, and for my Queen I chose Mlle Perle, like you a few minutes ago. On that day she little suspected the honour that was done her.

“ So the child was adopted, and brought up with the family. She grew up, and years passed. She was of a sweet nature, gentle and obedient. We all loved her, and she would have been spoilt outrageously had my mother not prevented it.

“ My mother believed in order and in social distinctions. She consented to treat little Claire like her own sons, but she insisted on the distance between us being well marked, and the situation made clear. Thus, as soon as the child was of an age to understand, she acquainted her with her history, and instilled gently, tenderly even, into the little one’s mind that she was for the Chantals an adopted daughter, to whom they had given a home, but that she was none the less a stranger.

“ Claire understood this situation with rare intelligence and a surprising instinct ; she managed to take and to keep the position allowed to her, with so much tact, good grace, and sweetness that my father was often moved to tears. Even my mother was so much touched by the passionate gratitude and the somewhat timorous devotion of this dear, loving little thing that she began to call her ‘ my daughter.’ At times, when the child had done something kind and delicate, my mother would push up her spectacles on to her forehead, a gesture which with her always indicated emotion, and she would repeat :

“ ‘ Why, that child is a pearl, a real pearl ! ’ ”

“ The name stuck to little Claire, who became and remained for us ‘ Mlle Perle. ’ ”

IV

M. Chantal stopped. He was seated on the billiard-table, his feet dangling ; his left hand toyed with a ball, while his right fingered a cloth which was used to rub the score off the slate, and which we called the chalk duster.

Slightly flushed, he was now speaking to himself in low tones, lost in his memories, wandering slowly through the ancient things and bygone events which awoke in his recollection as we wander through the old family gardens where we were brought up, and in which every tree, every path, every plant, the prickly hollies, the fragrant laurels, the yews whose red and oily berries crush between our fingers, call forth, at every step, some little event of our past life, one or another of those events, insignificant yet delightful, which constitute the very substance, the very woof of our existence. I remained facing him, with my back to the wall, my hands resting on my idle billiard-cue.

He went on, after a minute :

“ By Jove, she was pretty at eighteen, and graceful, and perfect ! Ah ! what a lovely, and good, and worthy, and charming girl she was ! . . . She had eyes, blue eyes, limpid and clear, the like of which I have never seen . . . never ! ”

He relapsed into silence. I asked :

“ Why did she not marry ? ”

He replied, not to me, but to that passing word 'marry.'

"Why? why? She wouldn't . . . wouldn't. Yet she had thirty thousand francs of a dowry, and was asked in marriage several times . . . She wouldn't consent. She seemed sad at that time. It was when I married my cousin, little Charlotte, my wife, whom I had been engaged to for six years."

I looked at M. Chantal, and it seemed to me that I could read his soul, that I was suddenly penetrating one of those humble and cruel tragedies of honest, upright, blameless hearts, looking into one of those unconfessed, unexplored hearts which no one has known, not even those who are its dumb and resigned victims.

Impelled suddenly by a bold curiosity, I said :

"It is you who should have married her, M. Chantal."

He started, looked at me, and said :

"I? Marry whom?"

"Mlle Perle."

"Why?"

"Because you loved her more than you did your cousin."

He looked at me with strange, round, frightened eyes; then he stammered :

"I loved her, I? . . . how? who told you that?"

"Why, it's easily seen. Indeed, it was on her account that you were so long in marrying your cousin, who had been waiting for six years."

He dropped the ball which he had been holding, clutched the chalk duster in both hands, and covering his face with it, began to sob.

He wept in a desolating and absurd fashion, as a sponge weeps when you squeeze it, by the eyes, the nose, and the mouth at the same time. He coughed, spat, snuffled into the chalk duster, wiped his eyes, sneezed, and started to run again through every slit in his face, with a throaty noise, which put me in mind of gargling.

As for me, scared and ashamed, I felt like running away, at a loss what to say, what to do, what to attempt.

And suddenly Mme Chantal's voice sounded on the stair: "Haven't you finished smoking up there?"

I opened the door and shouted: "Yes, Madame, we are coming down."

Then I rushed toward her husband, and, catching him by the elbows, cried: "M. Chantal, my dear Chantal, listen to me; your wife is calling you, compose yourself, compose yourself, quick! We must go down, compose yourself."

He stammered: "Yes . . . yes . . . I'm coming . . . poor girl . . . I'm coming . . . tell her I'm just coming."

And he began to wipe his face conscientiously with the cloth which, for two or three years, had wiped all the scores off the slate. Then he appeared, half white and half red, his forehead, nose, cheeks, and chin rubbed with chalk, his eyes swollen and still filled with tears.

I took his hands and hurried him into his room,

murmuring : " I beg your pardon ; I'm very sorry, M. Chantal, for paining you . . . but . . . I didn't know . . . you . . . you understand ? . . . "

He pressed my hand. " Yes . . . yes . . . there are difficult moments. . . . "

Then he dipped his face into his basin.

When he withdrew it he hardly seemed presentable yet, but I thought of a little ruse. As he showed anxiety on looking at himself in the mirror, I said : " All we've got to do is to say that you have a speck of dust in your eye, and you can weep in front of everybody, as much as ever you like. "

So he came down rubbing his eyes with his handkerchief. They made a fuss, every one insisted on looking for the speck of dust, which was not found, and they told of similar cases when a doctor had to be called in.

As for me, I had joined Mlle Perle, and I looked at her, tormented by an ardent curiosity, a curiosity which became painful.

She must indeed have been very pretty, with her gentle eyes, eyes so big, so calm, so wide open that she seemed never to close them as other human beings do. Her dress was rather ridiculous, a real old maid's dress, which made her look dowdy without detracting from her natural grace.

It seemed to me that I could read her as just now I had read M. Chantal ; that I could take in, from one end to the other, that humble, simple, and devoted life. I felt that I must speak ; I felt an impelling need to question her, to get to know whether she also had loved him, whether she had

suffered like him that long, secret, acute suffering which remains unseen, unknown, unguessed, but which breaks forth, at night, in the solitude of the dark chamber.

I looked at her ; I could see her heart beating under the chemisette of her bodice, and I wondered whether that gentle and candid being had moaned every evening in the damp thickness of her pillow, and sobbed and tossed in feverish unrest upon her bed.

And I whispered to her, just as children will break a jewel to look inside : “ If you had seen M. Chantal weeping just now, you would have pitied him.”

She gave a start. “ What ! He was weeping ? ”

“ Oh yes, he was weeping ! ”

“ And why ? ”

She looked greatly perturbed. I answered :

“ Because of you.”

“ Because of me ? ”

“ Yes. He was telling me how he had loved you, in the old days, and how reluctantly he had married his wife instead of you. . . . ”

Her pale face seemed to lengthen a little ; her calm, ever-open eyes closed suddenly, so suddenly that they seemed to have closed for ever. She slid from her chair on to the floor, sinking down gently, slowly, like a falling scarf.

I shouted : “ Help ! help ! Mlle Perle is fainting.”

Mme Chantal and her daughters rushed forward, and while water, a napkin, vinegar were being sought I took up my hat and bolted.

I strode away with a throbbing heart, my mind full of remorse and regret. Yet at times also I felt glad ; it seemed to me that what I had done was praiseworthy and necessary.

I asked myself : " Was I wrong ? was I right ? " They carried that in their souls like lead pellets in a closed wound. Would they not be happier now ? It was too late for their torture to begin afresh, early enough for them to remember it with fond emotion.

And perhaps on some evening of next spring, stirred by a moonbeam falling on the grass, at their feet, through the branches, they will take and clasp each other's hand in remembrance of all this stifled and cruel suffering. Perhaps also that short hand-clasp will send coursing through their veins a little of that thrill which they have never known, and will give these dead souls, recalled to life for a moment, the rapid and divine sensation of that intoxication, of that entrancement, which gives to lovers more bliss in one heart-throb than other men can gather in a lifetime.

THE DEVIL

THE peasant stood facing the doctor in front of the bed where the old woman lay dying. Peaceful and resigned, and in the full possession of her senses, she kept looking at the two men and listening to their talk. Though on the point of death, she had no feeling of resentment. She was ninety-two, and her time was up.

Through the open door and window the July sun came flooding in, and bathed with its warm flames the rough, uneven floor of brown earth trodden down by the clogs of four generations of yokels. The sultry breeze also wafted in the field-odours of grass, corn, and leaves, burnt by the midday heat. The grasshoppers shrilled lustily, filling the countryside with a dry crackling sound like that made by those wooden toys which are sold to children at fairs.

Raising his voice, the doctor was saying :

“Honoré, you can’t leave your mother all by herself in her present condition. She may pass away any minute.”

And the peasant kept on repeating helplessly :

“Must get in me corn all th’ same. It’s bin lyin’ too long, and it just ’appen the weather be good. What d’ye say, Muther?”

The old woman even now, when at death’s door, in the grip of her Norman greed signalled

"Yes," with her eyes and head, urging her son to get his corn in and leave her to die all alone.

But the doctor lost his temper and stamped his foot.

"You're just a brute, do you hear? and I'm not going to let you do it, do you hear? And if you've got to get your corn in this very day, go for La Rapet, damn you! And tell her to watch by your mother. I insist on it, do you hear? If you don't do as you're told, I'll leave you to die like a dog when it's your turn to be ill, do you hear?"

The tall, lanky peasant, slow of movement, was wracked by hesitation, torn between his fear of the doctor and his fierce passion for thrift, and while making a mental calculation stammered:

"What do her charge, La Rapet, for a watching?"

The doctor yelled:

"How do I know? It depends on how long you'll want her. You can come to terms with her, confound you! But I insist on her being here in an hour's time from now, do you hear?"

The man made up his mind.

"I'm a-goin', sir; I'm a-goin'. Don't ye be angry, Doctor."

As the doctor went away he called out:

"Just you be careful, my man! It's no joking matter when I'm annoyed!"

As soon as he was gone the peasant turned to his mother and said with resignation in his voice:

"I'm a-goin' arter Muther Rapet, seein' as how

he be wantin' me to. Don't ye be moilin' whiles I cum back."

And he too went out.

Mother Rapet was an old laundress who watched by the dead and dying of the parish and neighbouring villages. Then as soon as she had sewn her customers into the sheet from which they were never to escape, she would return to her iron with which she pressed the linen of the living. This woman, who was as wrinkled as an old apple, and whose body was doubled up as though the perpetual ironing had broken it in two, had a vixenish and covetous temper, and was possessed by a well-nigh phenomenal greed. She seemed to take ghoulish and cynical delight in deaths. Her sole subject of conversation was the people she had seen pass away—all the different ways of shuffling off the mortal coil which had come within her experience. These she would describe with a nice particularity as to the never-varying details, like a hunter telling of his shots.

Coming into her house, Bontemps found her blueing some water for the collars of the village women.

"Evenin' to you," said he. "Be it well with you, Muther Rapet?"

She turned her head toward him.

"Can't grumble. And how be it with you?"

"Oh! With me it be well enough. But it be ill with me muther."

"Your muther?"

"Yes, me muther!"

"What be the matter with your muther?"

"The matter be that her'll be a-turnin' up her toes!"

The old woman drew her hands out of the water, the bluish transparent drops gliding down to her finger-tips to fall back into the tub.

With precipitate sympathy she asked:

"Her be as low as that?"

"Doctor, he do say as how her won't last out beyond noon."

"Then her be low for sarten."

Honoré hesitated. The proposition he was going to make demanded a preamble or two. But, finding none, he took a sudden leap:

"What'll ye charge me for watchin' by her to the end? Ye know as how I be'n't rich. I can't afford a servant even. It be just that what's brought me poor muther to this, too much moilin' and toilin'! Her used to work like ten, spite her ninety-two years. There be'n't no more o' her kidney!"

Mother Rapet answered weightily:

"I've two prices: two francs a day and three francs a night for the rich; one franc a day and two a night for t'others. From you I'll take one and two."

But the peasant was thinking. He knew his mother well. With her dogged strength and toughness, the job might last a week, in spite of what the doctor said.

He said firmly:

"No. I'd liefer have one price for all to th' end. I'll chance it both ways. Doctor says her'll

go off soon. If her does, ye wins, and I loses. But if her holds out till th' morrow or longer, I wins, and ye loses ! ”

The watcher looked at him in astonishment. She had never made a contract for a death. The prospect of gambling tempted and made her hesitate. Then she began to suspect a trick.

“ I can't say nothing, not till I've had a look at her,” she answered.

“ Then come and have a look at her.”

She wiped her hands and followed him immediately.

On the way they said nothing. She walked with a hurried step, while he strode along with his long legs as if at each step he had a stream to cross.

The cows lying down in the fields, overpowered by the heat, raised their heads slowly toward these two passers-by, with a feeble lowing asking for fresh grass. As he came near his house Honoré Bontemps murmured :

“ Just suppose as it wert all over ? ” his unconscious desire for such a release betraying itself in his voice.

But the old woman was by no means dead. She was lying on her back in her truckle bed with her hands on the violet calico coverlet, horribly emaciated and knotted hands, looking like some curious monsters or crabs and locked by the rheumatism, the exertions, and the almost century-long tasks they had accomplished.

Mother Rapet went up to the bed and diagnosed the dying woman. She felt her pulse,

THE DEVIL

touched her chest, listened to her breathing, and put her some questions to hear her talk ; then, after a further long examination, she went out with Honoré in her wake. She had formed her opinion. The old woman would not last out the day.

“ Well ? ” he asked.

“ Well ! ” replied the watcher. “ This’ll last two days, mebbe three. I’ll take six francs, countin’ everythin’.”

“ Six francs ! Six francs ! ” he exclaimed. “ Be ye off your head ? Her have only five or six hours, I tells ye ! ”

They bargained for a long time. But as the watcher was on the point of going, as time was flying, and his corn would not come in of its own accord, he at last agreed.

“ Well, I agrees—six francs, countin’ all, till the corp be took away.”

“ I agrees—six francs.”

He strode away toward his corn stooked on the field under the harvest-ripening sun.

The watcher entered the house once more.

She had brought some work with her, for by the side of the dead and dying she worked without interruption, sometimes for herself, sometimes for the family, whom for some extra pay she served in this twofold capacity.

“ Have ye had the priest, at least, Muther Bon-temps ? ” she asked all at once.

The old woman’s head nodded “ No,” and Mother Rapet, who was religious, leapt up excitedly.

“Heaven help us! Would you believe it? I’ll be arter the priest.”

She rushed to the presbytery so fast that the urchins in the street, seeing her run, thought something terrible had happened.

The priest came along soon afterward in his surplice, preceded by his chorister ringing a bell to proclaim the passing of God through the burning heat of the quiet countryside. Men working in the far distance took off their large hats and stood motionless, waiting for the white vestment to disappear behind a farm; the women who were picking up the sheaves stood up to cross themselves; black hens scampered in terror along the ditches, trying to keep their balance, and made for their well-known hole, through which they suddenly vanished; a colt tethered in a meadow took fright at the sight of the surplice, and flinging up his heels, started rushing round and round at the end of his tether. The chorister walked past in his red petticoat; the priest, with his head bent sideways and wearing a square biretta, followed him, muttering prayers. Mother Rapet came behind, all bowed, bent double, as though she meant to prostrate herself while walking, her hands joined as in church.

Honoré saw them passing from the distance.

“Where be the priest a-goin’?” he asked.

His more quick-witted farm-hand answered him: “He be a-bringin’ the blessed Lord to your muther, man!”

"Mebbe, mebbe," rejoined the peasant without the least surprise, and set to again.

Mother Bontemps confessed, received absolution and communion, and the priest returned, leaving the two women alone in the stifling cottage.

Then Mother Rapet began examining the dying woman, wondering whether it would last long.

The sun was sinking; the air, now cooler, blew into the room with more quickening gusts, and stirred an Epinal print which was fastened on the wall by two pins; the tiny window curtains, white once, now yellow and fly-stained, seemed to struggle to fly away, as though, like the old woman's soul, they wished to depart.

Motionless, with open eyes, she seemed to await with indifference death, which was so near and yet so slow in coming. Her short breath made a slight whistling in her constricted throat. Soon it would stop, and there would be one woman less on earth, and no one would miss her.

As night was falling Honoré entered once more. Coming near the bed, he saw that his mother was still alive.

"Be ye all right?" he asked, as he used to do in the past when she was ailing.

Then he dismissed Mother Rapet, telling her:

"The morrow, five o'clock, for sarten sure."

"The morrow, five o'clock," she answered.

She came at dawn.

Honoré, before going out to the fields, was eating his soup, which he had made for himself.

"Well, has your muther gone?" asked the watcher.

"No, her be better," he answered with a malicious crease in the corner of his eyes.

Mother Rapet went up to the deathbed with a sudden feeling of anxiety. The old woman remained unchanged, short-breathed, but without suffering, her eyes open, her hands clenched on the coverlet.

The watcher realized that it might go on like this for two, three, eight days. Terror gripped her avaricious soul, and mad wrath boiled up in her against this sharper who had tricked her and this woman who would not die.

Nevertheless she sat down to her work and waited with her gaze fixed on Mother Bontemps' wrinkled face.

Honoré came back to lunch; he seemed to be in a happy, almost bantering, mood; then he went out again. Assuredly he had the best conditions for getting in his corn.

Mother Rapet was becoming exasperated; every minute that went by seemed to her now time and money of which she was being robbed. A mad desire came on her to seize the idiotic, pig-headed, obstinate old woman by the neck and by squeezing her throat a little to stop the slight, quick breath which was robbing her of her time and money.

Then she thought of the danger; and, other ideas passing through her head, she went up to the bed once more.

"Have ye seen the Devil yet?" she asked.

THE DEVIL

"No," whispered Mother Bontemps.

Then the watcher began to talk to her, telling her stories intended to cast terror into her weak, failing soul.

"A few minutes before they give up the ghost the Devil," she said, "shows himself to all dying folk. He carries a broom in his hand and a pot on his head and utters loud yells. When they have seen him it is all up, and they have only a few minutes more." And then she began a list of all those to whom the Devil had showed himself that year : " Joséphine Lorsel, Eulalie Ratier, Sophie Padagrau, Séraphine Grospied."

Mother Bontemps at last showed some emotion. She began to stir, moved her hands and tried to turn her head so as to look at the far end of the room.

Suddenly Mother Rapet vanished at the foot of the bed. From the cupboard she took a sheet and wrapped herself in it ; she covered her head with the pot, the short curved legs of which stood up like three horns ; with her right hand she seized a broom, and with her left a tin bucket, which she flung up sharply that it might drop down with a noise.

In hitting against the floor it made a terrific din ; then, climbing on a chair, the watcher lifted the curtain which hung at the end of the bed, and showed herself, gesticulating, uttering piercing shrieks inside the iron pot which covered her face, and threatening the old woman, now on the point of death, with her broom, like the devil in a show.

With a wild and dismayed look, the dying woman made a superhuman effort to raise herself and fly; she even succeeded in getting her shoulders and chest out of the bed; then she fell back with a loud sigh. It was the end.

And Mother Rapet calmly put back in their place all the articles: the broom in the corner of the cupboard, the sheet inside, the pot on the hearth, the bucket on the shelf, and the chair against the wall. Then, with professional movements, she closed the dead woman's dilated eyes, placed a saucer on the bed, poured into it water from the holy-water vessel, dipped in it the blessed branch of box which was nailed on the sideboard, and, dropping on to her knees, began to recite the prayers for the dead, which, as a professional, she knew by heart.

When Honoré came home in the evening he found her praying, and he immediately reckoned that she was still one franc up on him, since she had been only three days and one night, which came to five francs in all instead of the six which he owed her.

“TELLIER’S”

PEOPLE went there every evening at about eleven o’clock, just as to a *café*.

They would meet there, six or eight of them, always the same people ; they were not profligates, but respectable business men and young men of the town ; they would have their Chartreuse, joke a bit with the girls, or chat soberly with Madame, whom every one respected. Then they would go home to bed before midnight. The young ones sometimes stayed on.

The house, small and homelike, was painted yellow, and stood at the corner of a street behind the church of St Étienne ; and from its windows could be seen the dock full of unloading vessels, the big salt marsh called “La Retenue,” and behind that the Virgin’s Hill, with its old grey chapel.

Madame came of good peasant stock, from the Eure department, and had taken up this profession exactly as she might have become a milliner or laundress. The prejudice which attaches dishonour to prostitution, violent and deep-seated as it is in towns, does not exist in the country districts of Normandy. The peasant says, “It’s a good trade,” and he sends his offspring to run a seraglio as readily as to direct a boarding-school for young ladies.

The house, moreover, had been inherited from an old uncle who owned it. "Monsieur" and "Madame," formerly innkeepers near Yvetot, had at once wound up their business, considering that the Fécamp concern would be a better proposition to them ; and they had arrived one fine day to take on the management of the business, which was going to pieces in the absence of the owners.

They were worthy souls who soon made themselves popular with their staff and their neighbours. Monsieur died of a stroke two years later. As his new profession obliged him to lead a slack, sedentary life, he had grown very fat, and he was smothered by the excess of his own well-being.

Madame, ever since her widowhood, had been coveted in vain by all who frequented the establishment ; but she was reported to be perfectly virtuous, and not even her household had been able to get hold of anything against her. She was tall, plump, and comely. Her complexion, grown pale in the dim light of this perpetually shuttered house, was as shiny as though varnished with oil. A thin, artificial fringe of elfin curls encircled her brow, giving her a youthful air which was not in keeping with the mature lines of her figure. She was fond of a joke, being invariably in good spirits, of open countenance, and yet with a slight reserve, of which her new occupation had not as yet robbed her. Coarse language still shocked her a little, and when some ill-bred youth called by its correct name the establishment she directed

she was disgusted and showed annoyance. In short, she had a delicate soul, and although she treated her women as friends, she was fond of saying that “ they were by no means of the same class.”

Sometimes, during the week, she would go off in a hired conveyance with a portion of her troop, and they would go and frolic on the grass beside the little river that flows below Valmont. They were like parties of schoolgirls set free, with their madcap races, their childish games, all the joy of the house-bound drunk with the fresh air. They would eat ham or cold sausage, and drink cider, sitting on the grass, and at nightfall they would go back in a delicious fatigue, a state of gentle emotion. In the carriage they would embrace Madame as though she were the best of mothers, all sweetness and indulgence.

The house had two entrances. At the corner there was a sort of one-eyed *café*, open in the evening for the working people and the sailors. Two of the staff who managed the special business of the place were set aside for the needs of that section of the *clientèle*. They, with the help of Frederick, the waiter, a little fair, beardless man, as strong as an ox, served the decanters of wine and jugs of beer at the rickety marble-topped tables, and, with their arms flung round the necks of the drinkers, sat on their knees and encouraged them to consume more.

The other three ladies (there were only five of them) formed a sort of aristocracy, and were kept reserved for the first-floor custom, unless indeed

they were needed below and the first floor were empty.

The Jupiter drawing-room, where the middle-class citizens of the town foregathered, was papered in blue and ornamented with a large drawing representing Leda and her swan. Access to this spot was gained by means of a spiral staircase ending at a narrow door, of modest appearance, leading into the street ; and above this door there shone all night, behind some trellis-work, a little lamp, such as is still lighted in certain towns at the feet of Madonnas enshrined in the walls.

The building was old and damp, and smelt slightly musty. Now and again a whiff of eau-de-Cologne passed along the corridors, or perhaps from a half-open door below there would echo through the whole house, like a clap of thunder, the vulgar shouts of the men sitting round the tables on the ground floor, and the faces of the first-floor gentlemen would pucker in uneasy disapproval.

Madame, who was on familiar terms with her friends the clients, never left the drawing-room, and took interest in the town gossip that reached her through them. Her serious conversation provided a change from the disconnected chatter of the three women. It was a relief from the coarse jests of the corpulent men who gave themselves over each evening to the respectable and mild debauchery of drinking a glass of liqueur in questionable company.

The three ladies of the first floor were named Fernande, Raphaele, and Rowdy Rosa.

As the staff was limited in numbers, an attempt had been made to provide a kind of sample in each one of them, an epitome of the feminine type, in order that every customer might find there the more or less perfect realization of his ideal.

Fernande represented the ‘ fair beauty ’ ; she was very tall, plump to obesity, flabby, a country girl whose freckles refused to disappear, and whose mop of short hair, pale and colourless like combed flax, made an insufficient covering for her scalp.

Raphaele, a native of Marseilles, who had had experience in many seaports, played the indispensable part of the ‘ beautiful Jewess.’ Thin, with high cheek-bones heavily plastered with rouge, black hair burnished with beef-marrow and forming corkscrew curls on her temples, her eyes would have been beautiful had not the right been spoilt by a speck. Her arched nose curved over a prominent jaw, and two new teeth in the upper row clashed with those below, which had acquired, in the process of growing old, the dark tint of old wood.

Rowdy Rosa—a fat little dumpling, all stomach, with diminutive legs—sang songs, now rollicking, now sentimental, from morning till night in a strident voice, or told trivial and never-ending stories. She only stopped her talking to eat, or her eating to talk. Always restless, supple as a squirrel in spite of her fat and her tiny limbs, her laughter rang out continually, in a torrent of sharp shrieks, here, there, everywhere, in a bedroom, in the loft, in the *café*, for no reason.

Of the two ground-floor women, Louise was surnamed Cocote, and Flora was known as the See-Saw because she limped slightly. One was always dressed as Liberty, with a tri-coloured sash, and the other as the Spanish girl of popular fancy, with copper sequins that shook about in her carroty hair with each of her uneven steps. They had the appearance of kitchen-maids dressed up for a carnival. They were just like all working-class women, with neither more nor less of good looks. They were, in short, typical public-house servants. They were known in the port by the nickname of the two Pumps.

A jealous but rarely broken peace reigned among these five women, thanks to Madame's tactful wisdom and never failing good humour.

The establishment, the only one of its kind in the little town, was regularly patronized. Madame had succeeded in giving it so respectable an air, she had such a charming and gracious manner to everybody, her kind heart was so familiar to all, that she was treated with a sort of deference. The regular clients put themselves out for her, and boasted when she showed them particular favour. When they met one another in business during the day, they would say, "See you to-night, you know where," just as we say, "Meet me at the *café* after dinner."

In fact, the Tellier establishment was a boon, and there was rarely an absentee from the daily gathering.

But one evening toward the end of May the first arrival, Monsieur Poulin, wood merchant

and ex-Mayor, found the door closed. The little lamp, behind its trellis, was not burning ; not a sound came from the house ; it seemed dead. He knocked, gently at first, then with more force ; no one replied. Then he went slowly back up the street, and when he was close to the market-place he met Monsieur Duvert, shipowner, on his way to the same place. They went back to it together, but were no more successful. Suddenly there was a loud noise quite close to them, and on walking round the house they saw a company of English and French sailors, who were banging with their fists on the closed shutters of the *café*.

The two gentlemen at once fled, for fear of being compromised, but they were stopped by a low “ Psst ! ” ; it came from Monsieur Tournevau, fish salter, who, having recognized them, was hailing them. They told him what had occurred ; it was all the more serious in his case, because, being a married man, the father of a family, and closely watched, he only came there on a Saturday, “ *securitatis causa*, ” as he said, alluding to a regulation of the sanitary authorities the periodic application of which had been disclosed to him by his friend Dr Borde. This just happened to be his night, and it would mean for him a whole week’s deprivation.

The three men made a wide round as far as the quay, picking up on the way young Philippe, the banker’s son, a regular client, and Pimpesse, the tax-collector. They all came back together by Jews’ Street to make a final attempt. But the sailors, in exasperation, were besieging the house,

throwing stones and yelling, so that the five first-floor clients retraced their steps as quickly as possible and began to wander about the town.

They met M. Dupuis, insurance agent, and then M. Vasse, magistrate, and a long walk was embarked upon, which took them first to the jetty. They sat down in a row on the stone parapet and watched the billowing waves. The foamy crests made luminous patches of white in the darkness, which were blotted out almost as soon as they appeared, and the monotonous sound of the sea as it broke against the rocks went reverberating into the night all along the face of the cliffs. When the depressed walkers had been there some time, Monsieur Tournevau declared : " This isn't very lively."

" It certainly isn't," replied Monsieur Pimpesse, and they sauntered on again. After passing along the street that lies beneath the Virgin's Hill, and is called Underwood, they came back by the wooden bridge over the Retenue marshes, walked past the railway, and came out once more at the market, where a dispute immediately arose between the tax-gatherer, Pimpesse, and the salter, Tournevau, on the subject of an edible mushroom that one of them declared he had found in the district.

Their tempers being already soured by boredom, they might have come to blows, had not the rest interfered. Monsieur Pimpesse withdrew in a rage ; and at once a fresh altercation arose between Monsieur Poulin, the ex-Mayor, and the insurance agent, Monsieur Dupuis, on the sub-

ject of the tax-collector’s salary and his probable perquisites. Insulting remarks were coming thick and fast from each side when a terrific outburst of shouting was heard, and the band of sailors, weary of waiting in vain outside an empty house, came out on the market-place. They were walking arm-in-arm, in couples, in a long procession, and shouting furiously. The gentlemen concealed themselves behind a door, and the howling mob disappeared in the direction of the Abbey. For a long time their clamour could be heard, dying away like a storm in the distance ; then silence reigned once more.

Monsieur Poulin and Monsieur Dupuis, in a rage with each other, went off in different directions, without saying good-night. The other four started off again, and by instinct turned once more in the direction of “ Tellier’s.” It still remained closed, silent, impenetrable. A tipsy man was calmly and persistently tapping at the entrance to the *café*, and then pausing to call Frederick, the waiter, under his breath. Finding that no one answered him, he decided to sit down on the doorstep and await events.

The gentlemen were about to depart when the tumultuous mob of seamen reappeared at the end of the street. The French sailors were yelling the *Marseillaise*, the English *Rule, Britannia*. There was a general rush against the walls, and then the crowd of hooligans continued on its way to the quay, where a fight broke out between the sailors of the two nations. In the brawl one Englishman had his arm broken and a Frenchman had

his nose smashed. The drunkard who had stayed by the door was now crying, as tipsy men or thwarted children are wont to cry.

The gentlemen at length dispersed. Little by little calm descended once more upon the disturbed town. Here and there, at intervals, the noise of voices was still heard, and then died away in the distance.

One man only still wandered about. Monsieur Tourneveau, the salter, was desperate at having to wait till the following Saturday. He hoped against hope, not understanding, being exasperated with the police for thus allowing the closing of an establishment of public utility which it supervised and kept under its control.

He went back there, prowling round the walls, seeking the explanation; and he discovered a notice stuck to the shutter. He hastily lit a match and read these words, written in a large, uneven hand: "Closed for First Communion." After that he departed, realizing that all was indeed over.

The drunkard was now asleep, stretched full length across the inhospitable doorway.

Next day all the clients, one after another, found an excuse for passing that way, carrying papers under their arms to keep up appearances, and each with furtive glance would read the mysterious announcement: "Closed for First Communion."

II

Madame, it seemed, had a brother who had set up as a carpenter in their native Virville, in the

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Eure district. At the time when Madame was still an innkeeper at Yvetot she had presented for baptism the daughter of this brother and named her Constance, Constance Rivet, being herself a Rivet on her father’s side. The carpenter, knowing his sister to be in comfortable circumstances, did not lose sight of her, although they did not often meet, since both of them were much tied by their business, and also lived a long way from one another. But as the little girl was just going to be twelve years old and was making her first communion this year, he seized this opportunity of coming together again and wrote to his sister that he was counting on her for the ceremony. The old parents were dead ; she could not well refuse her goddaughter, and so she accepted. Her brother, whose name was Joseph, hoped that, by dint of kind attentions, he might perchance succeed in getting a will made in the child’s favour, seeing that Madame had no children.

His sister’s profession in no way caused him scruples, and, besides, no one in the district knew anything about it. It was merely said when she was mentioned, “Madame Tellier is a lady of Fécamp,” which gave the impression that she might have independent means. From Fécamp to Virville the distance was at least sixty miles ; and sixty miles by land for a countryman are as difficult to cover as the ocean is for a townsman. The people of Virville had never been beyond Rouen ; there was nothing to attract the Fécamp inhabitants to a little village of five hundred

dwellings, buried in the heart of the plains and belonging to another department. In short, no one knew anything about her.

But as the date of the communion drew near Madame found herself in great difficulties. She had no manageress and did not at all like leaving the house, even for a day. All the rivalries between the ladies of the upper floor and those of the lower would be certain to break loose. Then Frederick would, of course, get drunk, and when he was drunk he would knock a man down for a mere word. Finally, she decided to take her whole household with her, excepting the waiter, who was given a holiday until the following day.

The brother, when consulted, raised no objection, and undertook to house the entire company for one night. And so, on the Saturday morning, the eight o'clock express bore off Madame and her companions, in a second-class compartment.

As far as Beuzeville they were alone, and chattered like magpies. But at that station a couple got in. The man was an old peasant dressed in a blue blouse, with pleated collar and wide cuffs drawn in at the wrists and trimmed with a narrow white embroidery. On his head was an ancient top hat, the rusty surface of which looked bristly. He held in one hand an enormous green umbrella, and in the other a vast hamper, out of which emerged the startled heads of three ducks. The woman, sitting stiffly garbed in her rustic attire, had the features of a hen with a sharp nose like a beak. She sat opposite her husband, and did not

move a muscle, being overcome at finding herself in the midst of such grand company.

And, indeed, the wealth of colour in the carriage was dazzling. Madame was all in blue—blue silk, from head to foot—and she wore on top a shawl of imitation French cashmere of a blinding, flaming red.

Fernande panted in a Scotch gown, the bodice of which had taken all her companions’ strength to lace up ; the two domes of her flaccid bosom heaved continuously and looked liquid beneath the material of her dress.

Raphaelle wore a feathered headdress in imitation of a bird’s nest, and a lilac dress, bespangled with gold sequins, which had something of an oriental appearance and harmonized well with her Jewish features.

Rowdy Rosa, in a pink skirt with wide flounces, looked like an over-plump child, a fat dwarf ; and the two Pumps had apparently cut themselves out strange garments from some old window curtains—those old-fashioned flowered curtains belonging to the Restoration.

The ladies, being no longer alone in the compartment, at once put on serious expressions and began to talk of high matters, in order to make a good impression. But at Boldec there appeared a gentleman with blonde whiskers, rings, and a gold chain, who placed in the luggage rack over his head several parcels wrapped in oilcloth. He had a waggish and good-natured manner. He raised his hat, smiled, and asked airily : “ Are you ladies changing barracks ? ”

This question threw the party into embarrassment and confusion. Madame recovered herself at length, and replied in dry tones, wishing to avenge the honour of the company: "You might keep a civil tongue in your head!"

He apologized. "Pardon me, I meant to say 'changing monasteries.'"

Madame, either nonplussed as to what to answer or else perhaps satisfied by the correction, made a grave bow, with lips severely pursed.

Then the gentleman, who was sitting between Rowdy Rosa and the old peasant, began to wink at the three ducks whose heads were sticking out of the big hamper. Presently, when he felt he was beginning to hold his audience, he started scratching the creatures under their beaks, addressing comic remarks to them as he did so, in order to enliven the company. "So we've left our little pondy-pond, quack-quack! to make the acquaintance of the little spitty-spit, quack-quack!" The wretched creatures twisted their necks to avoid his caresses and made frightful efforts to escape from their wicker prison; then suddenly all three together gave vent to a pitiable cry of distress: "Quack-quack! quack-quack!" Thereupon there was an explosion of laughter among the women. They leaned forward; they jostled one another to get a look. The ducks aroused wild interest, and the gentleman redoubled his efforts to be gracious, witty, and entertaining. Rosa joined in, and leaning across her neighbour's legs, she kissed the three birds on their beaks. At once every one of the women wanted to kiss

them in turn, and the gentleman made the ladies sit on his knee, dandled them, pinched them, and all at once addressed them in the familiar second person.

The two peasants, even more terrified than their poultry, sat there not daring to move an inch, their eyes goggling frantically, and not a smile nor a tremor on their wrinkled old faces.

Next, the gentleman, who was a commercial traveller, offered the ladies braces, by way of a joke, and, taking down one of his parcels, opened it. It was a trick, for the parcel contained garters. There were some of blue silk, some of pink, some of red, some of violet, some of mauve, and some of flame colour, with metal clasps in the form of two intertwined gilt Cupids. The women cried out with delight, and then examined the samples, once again sobered by the seriousness natural to every woman who handles an article of dress. They consulted one another by glances or by whispers, and answered in like manner, while Madame enviously fingered a pair of orange garters, wider and more elaborate than the rest—garters just made for the mistress of an establishment.

The gentleman waited, hatching a scheme. “Now then, my pets,” he said, “you must try them on.”

At that there arose a storm of ejaculations, and they held their skirts tightly around their legs, as if they feared an outrage. He quietly bided his time.

“You won’t!” said he. “Very good! I’ll pack

up again"; and then cunningly he added: "I'll offer a pair, whichever you like to choose, to any of you who will try them on."

But they drew themselves up with great dignity, and refused. The two Pumps, however, seemed so unhappy that he renewed his offer. Flora the See-Saw, in particular, hesitated visibly, devoured by desire. He urged her. "Go on, girl, be brave; see here, this lilac pair will go well with your costume."

That decided her, and, lifting up her frock, she revealed the sturdy limb of a cow-girl, squeezed into a cheap stocking.

The gentleman stooped and fastened the garter at first beneath her knee, and then above, gently tickling the girl and making her give little shrieks and sudden starts. When he had finished he gave her the lilac pair, asking: "Whose turn next?"

All cried with one accord: "Mine, mine!" He began with Rowdy Rosa, who revealed a shapeless object, quite round, with no ankle, a veritable "sausage of a leg," as Raphaele used to say. Fernande was complimented by the traveller, who was roused to enthusiasm by her massive columns. The skinny shanks of the fair Jewess met with less success. Louise Cocote, by way of a joke, covered the gentleman's head with her skirt, and Madame was obliged to intervene, to put a stop to such an improper game. Finally Madame herself held out her leg, a fine Norman limb, plump and muscular, and the traveller, surprised and delighted, raised his hat gallantly, saluting this king of calves with true French chivalry.

The two peasants, petrified with amazement, looked on out of the corner of one eye. They were so exactly like fowls that the man with the blonde whiskers, when he got up, let off in their faces a “Cock-a-doodle-doo,” which gave rise to a fresh storm of merriment.

The old couple got out at Motteville, with their basket, their ducks, and their umbrella, and as they walked away the woman could be heard saying to her husband : “ ‘There’s another lot of them going off to that wicked Paris.’ ”

The waggish pedlar himself got out at Rouen, after such vulgar behaviour that Madame had been obliged to put him sharply in his place. She pointed a moral : “ ‘That will teach us to speak to the first person we meet ! ’ ”

At Oissel they changed trains, and found M. Joseph Rivet awaiting them at the next station with a big waggon, filled with chairs and drawn by a white horse. The carpenter politely embraced all the ladies and helped them up into his conveyance. Three sat on the three chairs at the back, Raphaele, Madame, and her brother on the three front chairs, and Rosa, not having a seat, perched herself as well as she could on the knee of the sturdy Fernande ; then the party set out. But the jerky gait of the nag at once began to jolt the waggon so terribly that the chairs began to dance about, tossing the travellers from side to side, with the movements of marionettes, making them pull terrified faces and give vent to shrieks of fear, suddenly cut short by a yet more violent bump. They clung to the sides of the vehicle,

their hats falling down behind, or over their noses, or over one shoulder; and the white horse went steadily on, his head stretched forward, his tail sticking straight out—a little bald rat's tail, with which he flicked his sides from time to time. Joseph Rivet, one foot stretched out on the shaft, the other leg bent beneath him, and his elbows well raised, held the reins, while every minute or two there issued from his throat a sort of cluck which made the nag prick up his ears and hasten his pace.

On either side of the road the green landscape unfolded itself. The flowering colza spread here and there a great billowing sheet of yellow from which arose a wholesome, pungent scent, sweet and penetrating, which the wind carried far afield. In the fields, where the rye was already standing high, cornflowers were showing their little blue heads; the women would have picked them but M. Rivet refused to stop. And sometimes a whole meadow looked as if it were sprinkled with blood, so thickly had the poppies sown themselves. And through the midst of these plains, so brightly tinted by the flowers of the field, the white horse trotted, with the waggon, which seemed itself to be carrying a bouquet of flowers of richer hue. It would disappear behind the tall trees of some farm, to emerge again where the leafage ended and continue on its way amidst the green and yellow crops, studded with reds and blues, bearing its brilliant load of women ever onward in the sunshine.

One o'clock was striking when they drew up

in front of the carpenter’s door. They were broken with fatigue and pale with hunger, having had nothing to eat since they had started. Madame Rivet rushed up and helped them down one after another, kissing them as soon as they touched the ground, and she never ceased fondling her sister-in-law, whom she wanted to monopolize. The meal was served in the workshop, from which the benches had been removed in readiness for next day’s dinner. An excellent omelette, followed by grilled chitterlings and washed down by good sharp cider, restored the spirits of the whole party. Rivet had taken a glass to be sociable, and his wife waited on them, cooked the food, brought the dishes in and took them away again, murmuring in each one’s ear : “ Have you got enough ? ” Piles of planks standing against the walls, and heaps of shavings swept into corners, gave out an odour of freshly planed wood, the odour of the carpenter’s workshop, that resinous fragrance which enters deep into the lungs.

The little girl was inquired for, but she was at church and not coming home until evening. The party then went out for a stroll to have a look round.

It was a tiny village crossed by a high road. Half a score of dwellings built along this one thoroughfare housed the tradesmen of the place—the butcher, the grocer, the carpenter, the coffee-merchant, the cobbler, the baker. The church, at the end of this street of sorts, was enclosed by a narrow cemetery, and four enormous limes, planted in front of the porch, cast a shadow

over the whole building. It was of hewn flint, of no style whatever, and surmounted by a slate belfry. Beyond, the open country began again, dotted here and there with clumps of trees, behind which farms lay hidden.

Rivet, although clad in workman's garb, had ceremoniously taken his sister's arm, and was conducting her with much impressiveness. His wife, who was quite overcome by Raphaele's gold-bespangled gown, had placed herself between her and Fernande. Rosa the dumpling came trotting behind with Louise Cocote and Flora the See-Saw, who was limping from exhaustion.

The inhabitants came to their doors; the children paused in their games; a curtain drawn up a little showed a glimpse of a head in a bonnet. An old woman on crutches, and almost blind, crossed herself as though meeting a religious procession, and every one turned to gaze long at all these fine ladies from town, who had come all this way for the first communion of Joseph Rivet's little girl. Great glory was reflected upon the carpenter.

As they passed the church they heard children singing—a hymn flung heavenward by shrill little voices—but Madame would not allow them to go in, for fear of disturbing the little angels.

After a stroll in the country, where he pointed out the chief estates, with details as to the yield of the land and the breeding of livestock, Joseph Rivet herded his women back and installed them in his house. As space was much restricted, they had been put in couples in the different rooms; Rivet for the occasion was to sleep in the work-

shop, on the shavings ; his wife was to share her bed with her sister-in-law, and in the adjoining room Fernande and Raphaele would sleep together. Louise and Flora found themselves housed in the kitchen on a mattress on the ground ; and Rosa was to occupy by herself a small, dark apartment over the stairs, next to the door of a narrow attic where the catechumen was to sleep that night.

When the little girl came in kisses were showered on her. All the women wanted to pet her, moved by their need for demonstrations of affection by the professional habit of fondling, which in the train had made them kiss the ducks. Each of them took the child on her lap, fingered the fine, fair hair, and held her close in transports of violent and instinctive emotion. The child, a good little girl all filled with piety, and sealed, as it were, by the absolution she had received, submitted to their treatment, sitting patient and thoughtful.

Since the day had been a heavy one for everybody, they retired very soon after dinner. The little village lay wrapped in the boundless stillness of the fields—a peaceful, all-pervasive, almost holy stillness reaching to the very stars. The women, accustomed to the boisterous evenings of the bawdy-house, were affected by the dumb repose of the sleeping countryside. They felt little shivers, not of cold, but of loneliness, coming from their troubled and uneasy hearts.

As soon as they were in bed, two by two, they clung to each other, as though to protect them-

selves against the pervasive presence of this deep, calm repose of nature. But Rowdy Rosa, alone in her dark closet and all unaccustomed to sleeping with empty arms, found herself in the grip of an indefinable and distressing emotion. She tossed and turned, unable to fall asleep, when she heard, from the other side of the wooden partition behind her head, low sobs as though a child were crying. Startled, she called out softly, and a little choked voice answered her. It was the child, who always slept in her mother's room, and was frightened in the narrow attic.

Rosa was delighted, and, getting up, went quietly, so as not to wake any one, to fetch the little girl. She brought her back into her warm bed, hugged her to her bosom, kissed and fondled her, and lavished on her exaggerated demonstrations of affection ; then, growing calmer herself, she fell asleep, and the catechumen lay till morning with her head on the bosom of the prostitute.

Punctually at five o'clock the little church bell, ringing the angelus with all its might, woke these ladies, who usually slept the whole morning long, as their only chance of recovering from their nocturnal labours. The peasants in the village were already up. The women of the district were going about busily from door to door, holding lively conversations and carrying with care little muslin frocks, as stiff as cardboard, or enormous church-candles with a bow of gold-fringed silk around them and notches of wax to show where to hold them. The sun was already shining in a

clear blue sky which had a faintly rosy tint on the horizon, as though a trace of the dawn still lingered there.

Bevies of hens were parading in front of their houses ; and here and there a black cock with lustrous neck-feathers would lift his purple-tipped head, flap his wings, and give vent to a brazen cry which would be echoed by his fellows.

Carts were arriving from neighbouring hamlets, depositing on the thresholds of the houses tall Norman women in dark clothes, with a fichu folded across the breast, fastened by some century-old silver heirloom. The men were wearing their blue blouses on top of new overcoats or their old jackets of green cloth, the tails of which hung down below. When the horses were stabled there was a double row, all along the main road, of rustic vans, waggonettes, cabriolets, tilburys, charabancs, vehicles of every shape and period, either resting on their noses, or hind part on the ground and shafts pointing heavenward.

The carpenter’s house hummed like a beehive. The ladies, in cotton bodices and petticoats, their hair hanging down their backs, short, scanty hair that looked tarnished and moth-eaten from long use, were busy dressing the child. The little one stood quite still on a table, while Madame Tellier directed the movements of her flying squad.

They scrubbed her, combed her, did her hair, dressed her, and, with the assistance of quantities of pins, arranged the folds of her frock, took in the waist, which was a little large, and planned an

elegant toilette. Then, when it was finished, they made the victim sit down, with the injunction not to move, and the party of excited females rushed off to adorn themselves in their turn.

The little church bell started to ring again. The feeble echoes of its poor chimes were lost as they rose heavenward, like some frail voice, soon drowned in the azure vastness. The catechumens came out of their houses, and went toward the communal building that contained the two schools and the mayoral offices, and was at one end of the village, while the 'House of God' was at the other. The parents, dressed in their best, with stiff faces and the awkward movements of those who are constantly bending over their work, followed their little ones. The girls were invisible behind clouds of tulle, like whipped cream, while the little men, looking like miniature waiters, with heads plastered with hair-oil, walked with legs wide apart, so as not to spoil their new trousers.

Glory was shed on a family when its child was surrounded by a large number of relatives, come from a distance ; and so the carpenter's triumph was complete. The Tellier brigade, led by the proprietress, followed behind Constance, the father arm in arm with his sister, the mother beside Raphaele, Fernande with Rosa, and the two Pumps together. It was a parade as impressive as that of staff officers in full uniform. The effect on the village was shattering.

At the school the girls ranged themselves beneath the bonnet of the good sister in charge, the

boys beneath the hat of the schoolmaster, a fine-looking man who carried himself well ; then they set off, to the accompaniment of a hymn. The boys led, stretching in two long lines between the two rows of unharnessed carts, and the girls followed in similar formation ; and as all the natives had given precedence to the ladies from town, out of respect, the latter came directly after the children, lengthening still further the double line of the procession, walking three on the left and three on the right and looking, in their gaudy attire, like a cluster of fireworks. Their entry into the church created a wild excitement among the congregation. People hustled and jostled one another and turned round to see them. Even some of the pious women talked almost aloud, stupefied by the sight of these ladies who were more bedizened than the choristers in their robes. The Mayor offered his bench, the first on the right next the choir, and Mme Tellier took a seat there with her sister-in-law, Fernande, and Raphaele ; Rowdy Rosa and the two Pumps occupied the second bench, together with the carpenter.

The choir of the church was full of kneeling children—girls on one side, boys on the other—and the tall candles they were holding seemed like lances, pointing in every direction. In front of the lectern three men stood, chanting at the top of their voices. They dragged out the sonorous Latin syllables interminably, dwelling for an eternity on the “Amens,” prolonging the first syllable endlessly, to the accompaniment of the

monotonous, long-drawn-out note which the copper serpent bellowed through its gaping maw. A child's shrill voice gave the responses, and from time to time a priest, sitting in his stall, with a square biretta on his head, rose to his feet, muttered something, and sat down again, while the three cantors started off once more, their eye, fixed on the big book of plainsong lying open before them supported by the outspread wings of a wooden eagle that swung on a pivot.

Then silence fell. The whole congregation, with one movement, knelt, and the celebrant appeared—an old and venerable priest with white hair, and head bowed over the chalice which he carried in his left hand. Before him walked the two red-robed servers, and behind came a crowd of choristers in big slippers, who drew up in two lines on either side of the choir. In the midst of the deep silence a little bell chimed. Divine service was beginning. The priest went slowly to and fro before the golden tabernacle, genuflecting, chanting in his broken, quavering old voice the preparatory prayers. As soon as he ceased all the choristers and the serpent burst forth together, and some of the men in the church sang as well, with more subdued voices, humbler, as befits members of the congregation. Suddenly the *Kyrie Eleison* rose heavenward, pouring forth from every mouth and every heart. Particles of dust and fragments of worm-eaten wood actually fell from the old roof, as it shook with this explosion of sound. The sun, striking the slates of the roof, made the little church as hot as

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a furnace, and a deep emotion, a trembling expectation, as the ineffable mystery drew near its consummation, gripped the children’s hearts, and tightened the mothers’ throats. The priest, who had been seated for some time, went up again to the altar and, with his silvery head bared, prepared with trembling movements for the supernatural act.

Turning toward the faithful and stretching out his hands to them, he pronounced the words “*Orate, fratres*” (“Pray, my brethren”). All prayed. The old priest now murmured beneath his breath the supreme, mysterious words; the little bell pealed again and again; the prostrate assembly invoked God; the children were growing faint with the intensity of their apprehension.

At this moment Rosa, her face buried in her hands, suddenly recollected her mother, the church in her own village, and her first communion. She imagined herself back in those days, when she was so small, quite lost in her white frock, and she began to cry. At first she cried softly, the tears welling slowly from her eyelids; then, as the memories crowded in on her, her emotion increased, and, with bursting heart and heaving breast, she sobbed aloud. Pulling out her handkerchief, she wiped her eyes and stuffed up her nose and mouth to prevent herself from shrieking: in vain, for a kind of hoarse rattle escaped from her throat. Two deep heart-rending sighs answered her from another quarter, where her two neighbours, Louise and Flora, prostrate beside her in the grip of the same far-off

memories, were also groaning, and shedding copious tears. Now, tears being infectious, Madame in her turn soon found her eyelids wet, and turning to her sister-in-law she saw that the whole row was weeping.

The priest produced the Body of the Lord. The children, flinging themselves low on the ground in a passion of devotion, were no longer conscious of anything ; and here and there in the body of the church a woman—mother or sister—affected by the peculiar contagious power of strong emotion, and also overcome by these grand ladies who knelt and shook with spasms and hiccoughs, drenched her cotton check handkerchief, and pressed her hand to her beating bosom.

Like the spark that sets fire to a ripe cornfield, the tears of Rosa and her companions spread in an instant throughout the whole party. Men and women, grey-beards, youngsters in new blouses, were soon sobbing one and all, and above them there seemed to hover something superhuman, an outpouring of spirit, the breath of some unseen, supernatural, all-powerful Being. Then from the choir of the church came a little sharp tap ; it was the sister, striking her book to give the signal for communion, and the children, shivering with a divine fever, drew near to the holy table.

One whole row knelt. The old priest, bearing the chalice of silver gilt, passed in front of them, holding out to them, between fingers and thumb, the sacred wafer, the Body of Christ, the redemption of the world. They opened their mouths

spasmodically, grimacing nervously, their eyes shut, and their faces very pale ; and the long linen cloth stretched beneath their chins quivered like running water.

Suddenly a kind of madness ran through the congregation, a muttering as of a crowd of lunatics, an outburst of sobs and stifled cries. It swept over like the wind storm beneath which the forest bends its head, and the priest stood motionless, a wafer in his hand, paralysed by the wave of emotion, and saying to himself : “ It’s God ; it’s God come among us, manifesting His presence, descending at my call upon His kneeling flock.” And distractedly he began muttering prayers, inarticulate prayers straight from his heart, in a frenzy of aspiration toward heaven. He finished giving communion in such spiritual ecstasy that his legs trembled beneath him, and when he himself had drunk the Blood of his Lord his consciousness lost itself in a wild act of thanksgiving. Behind him the congregation was gradually recovering itself. The choristers, distinguished by the dignity of the white surplice, began again in tones less firm, still tearful, and the serpent too seemed hoarse, as though the instrument itself had wept.

Then the priest, raising his hand, signed to them to be silent, and, passing between the two ranks of communicants, who were lost in beatific ecstasies, he came down to the choir-rails.

The congregation had sat down with a scraping of chairs, and all were now blowing their noses violently. As soon as they saw the priest they

were silent, and he began to speak in a low, hesitating, muffled voice: "My dear brothers, my dear sisters, my children, I thank you from the bottom of my heart; you have just given me the greatest joy of my life. I felt that God had come down among us at my call. He came, He was there, His Presence filled your hearts and made your eyes brim over. I am the oldest priest in the diocese, and to-day I am also the happiest. A miracle has been wrought among us, a true and great and sublime miracle. While Jesus Christ was entering for the first time into the bodies of these little ones, the Holy Spirit, the celestial Dove, the Breath of God, alighted upon you, took possession of you, gripped you, and bent you like reeds in the wind."

Then, turning to the two benches where the carpenter's guests were sitting, he said in clearer tones: "And, above all, my thanks to you, dear sisters, who have come so far and whose presence among us, whose visible faith and lively piety, have been for all an inspiring example. You have uplifted my parish; your emotion has fired all our hearts. Were it not for you, this great day might perhaps not have had so truly divine a character. Sometimes one chosen lamb is sufficient to induce the Master to descend upon the whole flock."

His voice broke, and with the words, "May God's Grace be upon you—Amen," he went up to the altar again to conclude the service.

There was now a general impatience to be gone. Even the children were restless, wearied

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by so long a tension of mind. They were hungry, too, and their parents gradually went out without waiting for the last Gospel, to finish the preparations for the repast.

Outside there was a crush, a noisy crush, and a medley of strident voices, talking with the sing-song Norman accent. The villagers formed two columns, and when the children appeared each family rushed at its own. Constance was pounced upon, surrounded, and embraced by the entire household of women. Rosa in particular never tired of hugging her. At length she took her by one hand and Madame Tellier by the other, Raphaele and Fernande held up her long muslin skirt, to prevent it from dragging in the dust, Louise and Flora closed the procession with Madame Rivet ; and the child, thoughtful and entirely filled with the God she carried within her, started off in the midst of this guard of honour.

The feast was set out in the workshop on long planks resting on trestles. Through the door standing open to the street, came all the joy of the village. Every one was making merry. Through each window could be seen a table full of folk in their Sunday clothes, and shouts could be heard coming from all these revelling households. The peasants, in shirt-sleeves, were drinking brimming glasses of strong cider, and in the centre of each group could be seen two children, sometimes two girls, sometimes two boys, dining with one or other of their respective families.

Now and again a waggonette, drawn by a jog-trotting old nag, would pass through in the heavy

noontide heat, and the driver, in his blue smock, would cast envious glances at all this display of good cheer.

In the carpenter's household, the gaiety had a certain tone of reserve, remaining from the morning's emotion. Only Rivet was in form, and he drank immoderately. Mme Tellier kept looking at the time, for, in order to avoid closing two days in succession, they were to take the 3.55 train, which would get them to Fécamp toward evening. The carpenter did his utmost to distract attention and keep his party until the following day, but Madame would not allow her mind to wander; she never took business matters lightly. As soon as they had had coffee she ordered her boarders to get ready quickly; then, turning to her brother, she said: "You go and get the waggonette ready at once." She herself went off to make her final preparations. When she came down again her sister-in-law was waiting for her, to talk about the child, and there ensued a long conversation in which no decision was arrived at. The countrywoman tried diplomacy, with fictitious emotion, and Madame Tellier, who had the little girl on her lap, would undertake nothing, but made vague promises: the child would be looked after; there was plenty of time; besides, they would be seeing one another again.

Meanwhile the carriage had not arrived, nor had the women come down. From upstairs came the sound of boisterous laughter, scuffling, shouting, and clapping of hands. So, while the car-

penter’s wife went to the stables to see if the carriage was ready, Madame finally went upstairs. Rivet, very tipsy and half undressed, was trying, unsuccessfully, to molest Rosa, who was weak with laughter. The two Pumps were holding him back by his arms and trying to quiet him ; they were shocked by such a scene after the morning’s ceremony. But Raphaele and Fernande, doubled up with mirth and holding their sides, were egging him on and shrieking wildly at each vain attempt on the part of the drunkard. The enraged man, all flushed and dishevelled, was making violent efforts to shake off the two clinging women, and pulled with might and main at Rosa’s skirt, stuttering : “ So you won’t, you b—— ! ” But the indignant proprietress rushed forward, seized her brother by the shoulders, and flung him outside with such force that he struck the wall. One minute after he was heard in the yard, pumping water on his head ; and when he reappeared in his carriage, he had already quieted down.

They set out once more, as on the previous evening, and the little white horse started off again with his lively jog-trot.

In the burning sunshine the gaiety that had lain dormant during the meal broke out freely. The women joked this time at the jolting of the vehicle, even shoving their neighbours’ chairs and bursting into laughter every other minute ; their spirits had been roused by Rivet’s fruitless attacks. The fields were bathed in an intense light that shimmered before the eyes, and the

wheels left in their wake two lines of dust that hovered over the road for a long while after the carriage had passed.

All at once Fernande, who was fond of music, begged Rosa to sing, and the latter gaily embarked on *The Fat Priest of Mendon*. But Madame speedily silenced her, being of opinion that this song was hardly suitable on such a day. "Sing us something of Béranger's instead," she added. Then Rosa, after a few seconds' hesitation, made her choice, and began, in her worn-out voice, *The Grandmother* :

" Said my grandma on her birthday
When she'd drunk two drops of neat,
Wagging head with naughty mirth gay :
' Lovers once did find me sweet !
But now I sigh
For my plump white arms,
Trim ankle's charms,
And time unused flown by ! ' "

And the women, led by Madame herself, repeated the chorus :

" ' But now I sigh
For my plump white arms,
Trim ankle's charms,
And love unused flown by. ' "

" Now that's fine ! " declared Rivet, roused by the swing of the tune ; and Rosa immediately continued :

" ' Tell us, Grandma, were you chaste then ? '
' No, at fifteen maiden use
Of self I learnt, and to seduce.
Bed, not sleep, was to my taste then. ' "

They all yelled the chorus together, and Rivet tapped with his foot on his shaft, beating time with the reins on the back of the white nag; the latter, apparently carried away likewise by the liveliness of the rhythm, broke into a mad gallop that flung the ladies in a heap, one on top of another, in the bottom of the cart.

They picked themselves up, laughing like lunatics, and the song went on, bawled at the top of their voices across the country, beneath the burning sky, in the midst of the ripening harvest. The little horse rushed madly on, more excited at each repetition of the refrain and breaking each time into a gallop over a hundred yards or so, to the great joy of the travellers.

Here and there some stone-breaker would straighten himself and look through his wire eye-protectors at this wild, yelling cartload disappearing through the dust.

When they got down at the station, the carpenter was quite plaintive. “What a pity you’re going away! We might have had such fun.”

Madame made the sensible reply: “Everything at the proper time. One can’t always be enjoying oneself.”

A sudden inspiration came to Rivet: “Why, I’ll come and see you at Fécamp next month”—and he looked at Rosa with a cunning air, and a mischievous sparkle in his eye.

“Now, now,” said Madame, “you must behave properly. You can come if you choose, but there must be no nonsense.”

He did not reply, and as the whistle of their

train could be heard he started at once to kiss them all round. When he came to Rosa's turn he made frantic efforts to get at her mouth, but each time she foiled him by a quick movement sideways, laughing behind her closed lips. He held her in his arms, but could not manage to achieve his object, hampered as he was by the long whip which he had kept in his hand and was now waving wildly behind the girl's back in his struggles.

"Take your seats for Rouen!" cried the station official, and they got in. A shrill whistle sounded, followed at once by a loud one from the engine, which noisily spat forth its preliminary cloud of steam, while the wheels began to move with a visible effort. Rivet rushed from the inside of the station to the barrier to catch one more glimpse of Rosa, and as the carriage with its freight of human merchandise passed him he started cracking his whip and jumping up and down, singing with all his might :

" ' But now I sigh
For my plump white arms,
Trim ankle's charms
And time unused flown by.' "

Then he watched a fluttering white handkerchief receding further and further into the distance.

III

They slept the whole way, the peaceful sleep of a good conscience, and when they re-entered the house, refreshed, rested, and ready for their nightly duties, Madame could not refrain from

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saying : “ All the same I was beginning to want to get home again.”

Supper soon over, they put on their war-paint, and awaited the usual clients ; and the little lamp, burning as though to a Madonna, indicated to the passers-by that the flock had returned to the sheepfold.

In the twinkling of an eye the news spread, though it would be impossible to say how or through whom. Monsieur Philippe, the banker’s son, was actually considerate enough to send a warning express letter to Monsieur Tournevau, held prisoner in his own household.

Now the salt-fish merchant had several of his relatives to dinner on a Sunday ; they were drinking their coffee when a man appeared, bearing in his hand a letter. Monsieur Tournevau, much agitated, tore open the envelope and turned pale. There were only the following words, written in pencil : “ Load of cod recovered ; vessel in harbour ; good business for you ; come at once.”

He fumbled in his pockets, gave the bearer a couple of sous, and said, flushing suddenly to the roots of his hair : “ I’ve got to go out.” And he held out to his wife the mysteriously laconic message. He rang and when the maid appeared said : “ My overcoat, quick, and my hat ! ” He was scarcely outside when he began to run, whistling a tune as he went, and the way seemed to him, in his burning impatience, twice as long as usual.

“ Tellier’s ” wore a festive air. On the ground floor the noisy voices of the seamen made a deafening racket. Louise and Flora did not

know where to turn next, drinking first with one, then with another, and showing themselves more worthy than ever of their nickname of "the two Pumps." They were summoned in all directions at once ; already the work was getting too much for them, and the night, for them at any rate, promised to be strenuous.

The first-floor circle was complete by nine o'clock. Monsieur Vasse, the county court magistrate and acknowledged aspirant (platonically) for Madame's favours, was chatting softly with her in a corner, and both were smiling as though an understanding was about to be reached. Monsieur Poulin, the ex-Mayor, had Rosa sitting astride his knees ; with her face pressed close to his, she was running her stumpy little fingers through the old fellow's white whiskers. A bit of bare thigh was visible beneath her turned-up skirt of yellow silk, contrasting with Monsieur Poulin's black trousers, and her red stockings were held up by blue garters, the commercial traveller's gift. Tall Fernande lay stretched out on the sofa, with her feet on the stomach of Monsieur Pimpesse, the tax-collector, and the upper part of her body on the waistcoat of Monsieur Philippe junior, whose neck she clasped with her right hand, while in her left she held a cigarette.

Raphaele seemed to be negotiating with Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and she concluded the conversation with the words, "Yes, my pet, this evening I should like to." Then, waltzing quickly round the room by herself, she cried : "This evening, anything you like."

The door opened suddenly, and Monsieur Tournevau appeared. Enthusiastic shouts of “ Long live Tournevau ! ” rang out, and Raphaele, still twirling, fell into his arms. He seized her in a terrific embrace, and without a word picked her up as if she were a feather, crossed the room to the door at the end, and disappeared up the bedroom staircase with his living burden, in the midst of applause from the rest.

Rosa, who was working the ex-Mayor up, kissing him over and over again and pulling both his side whiskers at once to keep his head upright, profited by this example. “ Come on, do the same,” she said. The old chap got up, pulled his waistcoat down, and followed the girl, fumbling in the pocket where he kept his money.

Fernande and Madame were left alone with the four men, and Monsieur Philippe exclaimed: “ I’ll stand you champagne. Madame Tellier, will you send for three bottles ? ” Then Fernande, hugging him close, whispered in his ear : “ Play for us to dance, will you, dearie ? ” He got up and, sitting down at an antediluvian spinette that stood idle in a corner, produced a sentimental waltz wheezed out from the groaning depths of the instrument. Tall Fernande clasped the tax-collector, Madame yielded herself to the embrace of Monsieur Vasse, and both couples revolved, exchanging kisses the while. Monsieur Vasse, who had once been to dances in the great world, displayed various airs and graces which made Madame look upon him with fascinated eyes, the eyes that say “ Yes ” more discreetly and deliciously than any spoken word !

Frederick brought the champagne, and as the first cork was drawn Monsieur Philippe executed the movements of invitation to a quadrille. The four dancers stepped it in the fashionable manner, gravely and respectably, with flourishes, bows, and curtsies. After that the drinks were handed round, and then Monsieur Tournevau reappeared, satisfied, relieved, and radiant. "I don't know what's happened to Raphaele, but she's absolutely perfect this evening," he exclaimed, and emptied the glass they offered him at one draught, muttering: "Jove, that's what I call luxury."

The next minute Monsieur Philippe embarked on a lively polka, and Monsieur Tournevau sprang forward, holding the fair Jewess in the air without letting her feet touch the ground. Monsieur Pimpesse and Monsieur Vasse had started off again with fresh zest. Every now and then one of the couples would pause near the mantelpiece and toss off a glass of champagne, and the dance was threatening to last for ever when Rosa pushed open the door, holding a candlestick in her hand. Her hair was undone, and she was in bedroom slippers and nightgown, all rosy and excited. "I want to dance," she called out, and when Raphaele asked: "What about your old man?" Rosa gave a snort of laughter. "Him? He's asleep already. He goes off at once." She caught hold of Monsieur Dupuis, who was sitting idle on the sofa, and the polka began again. But the bottles were empty. "I'll stand one," announced Monsieur Tournevau. "So will I," said Monsieur Vasse. "Same here," said Mon-

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sieur Dupuis, and every one clapped. The affair was becoming organized and turning into a real ball. Now and again even Louise and Flora would run up quickly and waltz round a few times while their clients below waited impatiently ; then they would hurry back to their *café*, with their hearts full of regret.

At midnight the dancing was still going on. At intervals one of the girls would disappear, and when the others looked for her to make up a set, it would suddenly be noticed that one of the men was also missing. “ Wherever have you been ? ” Monsieur Philippe humorously inquired just at the moment when Monsieur Pimpesse was returning with Fernande. “ To see Monsieur Poulin asleep,” replied the tax-collector. The witticism had a huge success, and every one took it in turn to go up with one or other of the young ladies and see Monsieur Poulin asleep ; the former on this particular night were amazingly obliging. Madame turned a blind eye to it all and carried on long asides in odd corners with Monsieur Vasse, as though settling the final details of an arrangement already agreed upon.

At last, at one o'clock, the two married men, Tournevau and Pimpesse, announced their departure, and wanted to settle their account. They were only charged for the champagne, and that at six francs a bottle instead of ten, the usual price. And when they expressed their amazement at such generosity Madame replied, beaming :

“ It's not a feast-day every day in the week ! ”

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GREAT misfortunes do not sadden me at all," said John Bridelle, an old bachelor, who passed for a sceptic. "I have seen war at close quarters ; I strode over the bodies without being moved. The harsh brutalities of nature or of men can make us cry out with horror or indignation, but do not give us that plucking at the heart-strings, that shudder down the spine, which comes at the sight of certain little distressing things. The most violent affliction that can be felt is certainly the loss of a child, for its mother ; and the loss of his mother, for a man. This is violent and terrible : it overwhelms and lacerates ; but one recovers from these calamities as from deep, bleeding wounds. But certain encounters, certain things just glimpsed or guessed at, certain secret sorrows or treacheries of fortune, which stir in us a whole world of painful thoughts, and which open abruptly before us the mysterious door of moral suffering, complex, incurable, all the deeper in that they appear benign, all the more bitter from being almost imperceptible, all the more tenacious in that they appear artificial, leave in our mind a kind of trail of sadness, a bitter flavour, a feeling of disenchantment that takes a long time to throw off.

"I have still before my eyes two or three

things that other people would assuredly never have noticed, and which have pierced into me little long, fine, and incurable stings. You would possibly not understand the emotion which has remained with me from these fleeting impressions. I shall only tell you of one ; it dates from long ago, but is as vivid as if it were of yesterday.

“ I am fifty years old. I was young then, and studying law, rather melancholy, something of a visionary, imbued with a gloomy philosophy. I cared nothing for noisy *cafés*, brawling companions, or stupid wenches. I rose early, and one of my most cherished pleasures was to walk alone, about eight o'clock in the morning, in the pinery of the Luxembourg ; have you never known that pinery ? It was like some forgotten garden of another age—as pretty as the gentle smile of an aged woman. One entire corner of this delightful shrubbery was frequented by bees ; the miniature doors of their straw houses, which stood cleverly arranged on wooden shelves, were open to the sunshine, and all along the paths one came across buzzing, golden flies, the real owners of this peaceful spot, the real frequenters of these long, tranquil alleys.

“ I used to come there nearly every morning ; I would sit on a bench and read ; at times I let my book fall on my knees, in order to dream, to listen to the life of Paris around me, and to enjoy the infinite repose of these old-fashioned groves of yoke-elm.

“ But I soon noticed that I was not the only visitor who came to this spot as soon as the gates

opened ; and sometimes I would meet, face to face, at the corner of a grove, a strange little old man. He wore silver-buckled shoes, flap breeches, a snuff-coloured overcoat, a lace ruffle for cravat, and an extraordinary grey hat with broad brim of coarse nap, which sent one back to the Flood.

“ He was thin, very thin, and angular, and always grimacing and smiling. His bright eyes fluttered and shifted under a continual movement of the pupils, and he always carried a superb walking-stick with a gold knob, which was no doubt some magnificent memento of his. The little fellow at first astonished me, and then interested me beyond measure, and I watched him through the leafy walks, following him at a distance, pausing at the turns of the shrubbery so as not to be seen.

“ And, behold, one morning, imagining himself quite alone, he began to make singular movements, first little leaps, then a bow ; then he struck a cross-caper with his thin leg, still deftly, and then he began to pivot gracefully, leaping, fluttering in a strange manner, smiling as though before an audience, bowing his thanks, rounding his arms, twisting his poor puppet-like body about, directing into space his airy bows, that were both moving and ridiculous. He was dancing ! I remained petrified with astonishment, asking myself which of us two was mad, he or I.

“ But he stopped suddenly, advanced, as actors do on the stage, then bowed, stepping backward, with the gracious smiles of an actress, and kisses

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blown from his hand toward the two lines of clipped trees. Then he gravely resumed his walk.

“ From that day I never lost sight of him, and each morning he recommenced his extraordinary exercise. I had a mad desire to speak to him. I risked it and, bowing, said to him : ‘ It is a fine day to-day, sir.’

“ He bowed. ‘ Yes, sir, it is just like the good old days.’

“ A week later we were friends, and I learned his history. He had been dancing-master at the Opera in the days of Louis XV, his beautiful walking-stick was a gift from the Comte de Clermont, and when one spoke of dancing to him there was no stopping his chatter.

“ But one day he confided to me : ‘ I married La Castris, sir ; I will introduce you if you like, but she doesn’t come here till later in the day. This garden, you see, is our delight—our life. It is all that remains to us of old times. It seems to us as though we could not exist without it. It has age and distinction, has it not ? I feel I breathe an air in it which has not changed since my youth. My wife and I spend all our afternoons here, but I come here the first thing in the morning, for I rise early.’

“ As soon as I had finished luncheon I returned to the Luxembourg, and I soon caught sight of my friend, ceremoniously arm in arm with a little old woman, dressed in black, to whom I was introduced. It was ‘ La Castris,’ the great and celebrated dancer, beloved of princes, of the

King, of all that courtly age which seems to have left behind it the fragrance of love.

"We seated ourselves on a bench ; it was the month of May, and a scent of flowers pervaded the prim alleys. The warm sunshine came glancing through the leaves, scattering upon us great drops of light. The black dress of 'La Castris' seemed all saturated with brightness.

"The garden was empty. In the distance sounded the rumbling of cabs. 'Explain to me,' I said to the old dancer, 'what the minuet was.'

"He gave a start. 'The minuet, sir, is the queen of dances, and the dance of queens, you understand. Now there are no longer any kings, there is no minuet,' and he began in pompous style a long dithyrambic eulogy, of which I could understand nothing. I wanted him to depict for me all the steps, movements, and postures. He became confused, exasperated by his ineffectualness, nervous and distressed, and suddenly, turning to his aged companion, who stood silent and grave as usual : 'Élise, shall we—say, shall we—it would be nice of you—shall we show Monsieur what it was like ?'

"She looked all around her with anxious eyes, then rose without saying a word, and came and placed herself in front of him.

"Then I saw something unforgettable. They stepped backward and forward with childish grimaces, smiled to each other, poising, bowing, skipping like two old dolls made to dance by an outworn mechanism, a little broken, the work of a clever artisan of bygone days, who followed the

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fashion of his times. As I watched them my heart was stirred by strange sensations and my soul was moved by an indescribable melancholy. It seemed as though I saw a vision both piteous and comic, the antiquated ghost of an age. I was inclined to laugh, and yet constrained to weep.

“All of a sudden they stopped—they had finished the ‘figures’ of the dance. For several seconds they remained standing, facing each other, grimacing in a strange fashion; then they embraced, sobbing.

“Three days later I left for the country; I never saw them again. When, two years after, I returned to Paris, the pinery had been destroyed. What became of them, without their beloved garden of the past, with its labyrinthine walks, its aroma of other days, and the graceful curves of its hornbeam hedges? Are they dead? Do they wander, hopeless exiles, through the modern streets? Do they dance, eerie spectres, a fantastic minuet among the cypress trees of some cemetery, along the paths bordered by tombs, in the light of the moon?

“Their memory haunts me, obsesses me, tortures me, remains like a wound within me. Why, I cannot say.

“Doubtless you will think this ridiculous.”

THE BURGLAR

THE old artist seated himself astride a chair. This was in the dining-room of a hotel at Barbizon. He began :

“ That evening we had dined with poor Sorieul, now dead and gone, who was the most determined joker of us all. There were only three of us : Sorieul, myself, and Le Poittevin, I think, though I wouldn’t swear that it was he.

“ To say that we had dined with Sorieul is as much as to say that we were drunk. Le Poittevin alone had retained his wits, somewhat drowned, indeed, but still clear. We were young in these days. We were lying on rugs, and discoursing extravagantly in the little room next to the studio.

“ Sorieul, with his back on the floor and his legs on a chair, was talking of battles, and discoursing on the uniforms of the Empire. He got up suddenly, took from the big press where he stored his properties a hussar’s tunic, all complete, and put it on. After which he compelled Le Poittevin to dress up as a grenadier. As the latter resisted, we got hold of him, and, after undressing him, thrust him into an immense uniform in which he was entirely lost. I got myself up as a cuirassier. Sorieul put us through some complicated drill ; then he exclaimed : ‘ Since we

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are old campaigners this evening, let us drink like old campaigners.'

"We lighted and drank a bowl of punch; then a second time the flame rose over the bowl filled with rum. And we shouted at the top of our voices ancient songs which had once been bawled by the old troopers of the 'Grande Armée.'

"Suddenly Le Poittevin, who remained, in spite of everything, almost *compos mentis*, bade us shut up. Then, after a silence of a few seconds, he said in a half-whisper :

" 'I am sure I heard a footstep in the studio.'

"Sorieul rose as best he could, and exclaimed : 'A burglar! what luck!' Then suddenly he started to sing the *Marseillaise* :

'To arms, citizens!'

And rushing to a trophy, he equipped us according to our uniforms. I got a sort of musket and a sabre; Le Poittevin a gigantic gun with a bayonet; and Sorieul, not finding what he wanted, seized upon a horse-pistol, which he slipped into his belt, and a boarding-axe, which he brandished. Then he cautiously opened the studio door, and the army advanced over the suspected ground. When we reached the centre of the spacious room, crowded with immense canvases, with furniture, with strange and unexpected objects, Sorieul said to us :

" 'I appoint myself general. Let us hold a council of war. You, the cuirassiers, will cut off the enemy's retreat, that is to say, lock the door. You, the grenadiers, will form my escort.'

"I carried out the movement required of me; then I rejoined the main forces, which were engaged in reconnoitring.

"We had been searching every nook and corner of the studio without success, for at least twenty minutes, when it occurred to Le Poittevin to open an immense wall-press. It was dark and deep; I stretched forth my arm with the light, and drew back dumbfounded: a man was there, a live man, who had looked at me. We rushed in with a howl. There was a terrific scrummage in the dark, and after five minutes of a struggle that beggars description we brought out to the light a kind of hoary-headed old bandit, sordid and ragged. We bound him hand and foot, and plumped him down in an arm-chair. He didn't utter a word.

"Then Sorieul, with tipsy solemnity, turned toward us:

" 'Now we must try this scoundrel.'

"I was so drunk that this proposal appeared to me quite in order. Le Poittevin was briefed for the defence; it fell to me to prosecute.

"He was condemned to death unanimously, his counsel alone dissenting.

" 'Let us execute him,' said Sorieul. But a scruple came to him: 'This man must not die without religious ministration. Shall we go for a priest?'

"I objected that it was very late. Then Sorieul suggested that I should fill the priest's office, and exhorted the criminal to pour his confession into my bosom. The man, for five minutes, had been

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rolling his eyes in terror, wondering what kind of beings he had to deal with. He now said in a hollow voice—the husky voice of the drunkard : ‘ This is a joke, I suppose.’ But Sorieul compelled him to kneel, and, for fear his parents had omitted to have him baptized, poured a glass of rum over his head.

“ Then he said : ‘ Confess to this gentleman ; your last hour has struck.’ ”

“ Terrified, the old rogue began to shout : ‘ Help ! ’ with such strength that we had to gag him, lest he should wake all the neighbours. Then he rolled on the ground, kicking and twisting, upsetting the furniture and bursting the canvases. At last Sorieul, out of patience, cried : ‘ Let us make an end ! ’ ”

“ Aiming at the poor wretch on the floor, he pressed the trigger of his pistol. The hammer fell with a little click. Carried away by this example, I also had a shot at him. My gun, which had a flint-lock, gave a spark which made me jump.

“ Then Le Poittevin gravely uttered these words :

“ ‘ Are you sure that we have the right to kill this man ? ’ ”

“ Sorieul answered in amazement : ‘ Haven’t we condemned him to death ? ’ ”

“ But Le Poittevin went on : ‘ You don’t shoot civilians. This one must be handed over to the executioner. We must take him to the police-office.’ ”

“ This argument struck us as conclusive. We

picked the man up, and as he couldn't walk, we laid him on a board of the staging used for models, and fastened him securely. Then I carried him off with Le Poittevin, while Sorieul, armed to the teeth, walked behind.

"In front of the police-station the sentry stopped us. The officer in charge called out, recognized us, and as he was a daily witness of our jokes and pranks and unheard-of inventions, he merely laughed, and declined to take in our prisoner.

"Sorieul insisted ; then we were told sternly to go home without creating a disturbance.

"Our party got under way again, and went back to the studio. I asked : ' What shall we do with the burglar ? '

"Le Poittevin declared in a maudlin voice that the poor man must be very tired. Indeed, he seemed at his last gasp, thus trussed and gagged and tied to his board. It was my turn to be seized with an outburst of drunken pity, and removing his gag, I asked him : ' Well, old chap, how are you ? '

"He groaned : ' I've had enough, curse you ! '

"Then Sorieul became quite fatherly. He cut him loose, sat him down, made him comfortable ; and to restore him, the three of us hastened to brew another bowl of punch. The burglar, sitting quietly in his arm-chair, watched us.

"When the drink was ready we handed him a share—we would have propped up his head or done anything for him—and we clinked glasses.

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“ The prisoner drank like a sieve. But as day began to dawn he rose, and said very coolly :

“ ‘ I shall have to leave you ; I must be getting home.’ ”

“ We were very sorry ; we tried to get him to stay, but he refused to remain any longer. Then we shook hands, and Sorieul, with his candle, lighted him to the hall, shouting : ‘ Mind the step at the front door ! ’ ”

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SHE was one of those pretty and charming girls, born, as if through some error of destiny, in a working family. She had neither dowry nor expectations, no means of becoming known, of being understood, loved, and wedded by a man rich and distinguished, and she allowed herself to be married to an under-clerk of the Ministry of Education.

She dressed simply, since she could not afford adornment, but she felt this as keenly as if she had come down in the world ; for women are above caste or descent : their beauty, grace, and charm stand them in stead of birth and family-tree. Their inborn delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their adaptability of mind are all that differentiates them, and raise the daughters of the people to the level of the greatest ladies in the land.

She suffered constantly, feeling herself born for every refinement of luxury. She resented the poverty of her home, the drab walls, the shabby seats, the ugly draperies.

All these things, which any other woman of her social level would never even have noticed, tortured and angered her. The sight of the little Breton maid who did the modest housework would awaken within her hopeless regret and wild yearning.

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Her mind would conjure up silent ante-chambers, thickly hung with Oriental draperies, and lit by lofty bronze candelabra ; and the two tall footmen in knee-breeches, dozing in the roomy arm-chairs in the drowsy and oppressive warmth of the heating apparatus. She would think of spacious drawing-rooms garnished with ancient silks, with exquisite furniture bearing priceless curios ; of dainty and perfumed boudoirs, cosy for the five-o'clock chat with one's most intimate friends, with the men of the day, whose attention is for all women an object of envy and desire.

When she sat down to dinner at the round table covered with a cloth three days old, opposite her husband, who, on taking the lid off the soup-tureen, would exclaim delightedly, " Ah ! the good *pot-au-feu* ! there's nothing to equal it . . ." her mind would turn to dainty dinners, to glittering silver-plate, to tapestries peopling the walls with ancient personages and strange birds in some fairy forest ; she thought of exquisite dishes served up in marvellous wares, of compliments whispered and listened to with a sphinx-like smile, while one toys with the rosy flesh of a trout or the wing of a pheasant.

She had no finery, no jewels, nothing. And she loved these things only, she felt she was made for them. How she longed to please, to be envied, to be attractive and sought after !

She had a rich friend, a school friend of her convent days, whom she could no longer bear to call upon, so much did she suffer when she

returned home. She would weep for days at a time, out of mortification, regret, despair, and misery.

Now, one evening her husband came home triumphant and flourishing a large envelope.

"Look here," he said, "I have something for you."

She tore it open eagerly, and drew forth a printed card bearing these words :

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame Georges Ramponneau will be at home on Monday evening, 18th January."

Instead of showing delight, as her husband had hoped, she peevishly threw the invitation on the table, murmuring :

"What use is that to me ?"

"Why, my dear, I thought you would be pleased. You never go out ; this is an occasion for you, and a fine one ! It was no easy job to get it. Everybody is after them, they are in great demand, and not many go to the staff. You will see all the official world there."

She looked at him with blazing eyes, and said impatiently :

"And what am I to put on my back if I go ?"

He had not thought of that ; he answered haltingly :

"Why, your theatre gown. It's all right, it seems to me . . ."

He stopped, taken aback, quite upset, on seeing that his wife was crying. Two big tears were slowly rolling down from the corners of her eyes to the corners of her mouth. He stammered :

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“What is the matter? What is wrong?”

With a violent effort she pulled herself together and answered calmly, as she dried her wet cheeks :

“Nothing. Only I have no evening dress and consequently cannot attend this *fête*. Give your card to some colleague whose wife has a better wardrobe than I.”

He was greatly troubled. Presently he said :

“Come, Mathilde ; how much would a suitable dress cost ? Something that you could wear on other occasions, something quite plain.”

She reflected for a few moments, reckoning up, and wondering also what sum she might ask for without being met by an immediate refusal and an exclamation of dismay from the thrifty clerk. At last she answered hesitatingly :

“I don’t know exactly, but I think that with four hundred francs I could manage.”

He went rather pale : that was just the sum he had set aside to purchase a gun and enjoy some sport, the following summer, in the Nanterre plain, with a few friends who sometimes went to shoot larks over there on a Sunday. However, he said :

“All right : I’ll give you four hundred francs. But try to get a nice dress.”

The date of the ‘At Home’ was drawing near, and Madame Loisel seemed depressed, restless, and anxious. Yet her dress was ready. Her husband said to her one evening :

“What is it? Tell me ; you have been quite out of sorts for the last three days.”

She answered :

"It worries me that I haven't one bit of jewellery, not one stone, nothing to put on me. I'll look like a beggar. I would almost as soon not go to that *soirée*."

He replied :

"You will wear natural flowers. They are very 'tony' at this time of year. For ten francs you will get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No! There's nothing so mortifying as to look poverty-stricken among women who are rich."

Her husband exclaimed :

"Why, you are a stupid! Go to your friend Mme Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You are sufficiently intimate with her."

She uttered a cry of joy.

"True! I hadn't thought of it."

The next day she called on her friend, and unfolded her trouble. Mme Forestier went to her wardrobe, took out a large jewel-box, brought it, opened it, and said to Mme Loisel :

"Choose for yourself, my dear."

She saw, first, some bracelets, then a string of pearls, then a Venetian cross, of gold and pearls, admirably wrought. She tried on the jewels in front of the mirror, hesitating, loth to take them off and hand them back. She kept on asking :

"Have you nothing else?"

"Oh, yes! Look through the box. I don't know what might please you."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box,

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a magnificent diamond necklace, and her heart began to beat with immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she lifted it out. She fastened it round her throat, over her high-necked dress, and remained in ecstasy before her image in the mirror. Then, in a hesitating, anguished voice :

“ Can you lend me that, only that ? ”

“ Why, certainly.”

She hugged her friend, kissed her passionately, and fled with her treasure.

The great day came, and Mme Loisel scored a success. She was prettier than anyone else, elegant, graceful, smiling, and beside herself with delight. All the men looked at her, asked her name, were anxious to be introduced. All the attachés of the Ministry wanted to waltz with her ; she was noticed by the Minister. She danced with rapture, with passionate delight, intoxicated with pleasure, bereft of thought, in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of haze of happiness, made up of all this adulation, admiration, and awakened desire, of that feeling of complete victory which is so sweet to the heart of woman.

She departed toward four in the morning. Her husband, since midnight, had been asleep in a small and deserted reception-room, with three other men whose wives were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps which he had brought for the return home, modest garments of everyday life, the meanness of which

stood in sharp contrast to the elegance of her ball-dress. She felt this, and tried to slip away, lest she should be noticed by the other women, who were wrapping up in rich furs. Loisel held her back.

"Wait a minute. You will catch cold outside. I'll call a cab."

But she would not listen, and hurried down the stairs. Once in the street, they found no conveyance, and they started in quest of one, hailing the cabmen whom they saw passing in the distance. They were walking down toward the Seine, shivering and in despair. At last they found on the embankment one of those ancient night-prowlers which in Paris are only seen after dark, as if they were ashamed to show their decrepitude in broad daylight.

It brought them to their door, in the suburban Rue des Martyrs, and they drearily climbed up to their flat. For her, it was all over. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at his office at ten o'clock.

She took off the things which she had wrapped round her shoulders, in front of the mirror, to take a last look at herself in all her glory. Suddenly she uttered a cry. The diamonds were gone!

Her husband, already half undressed, asked :
 "What is the matter?"

She turned toward him, panic-stricken.

"I have . . . I have . . . I haven't got Mme Forestier's necklace."

He started up in dismay :

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"What ! what ! impossible !"

And they searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of her cloak, in the pockets, everywhere. It was not to be found. He asked :

"You are sure you still had it on leaving the dance ?"

"Yes, I touched it in the hall."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, very probably. Did you take the number ?"

"No. And you—didn't you look at it ?"

"No."

They gazed at each other in consternation. At last Loisel put his clothes on again.

"I will go over all the ground which we walked," he said, "to see whether I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in her ball dress, without strength to go to bed, prostrated in her chair, without a fire, her mind a blank. Her husband came back about seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to the headquarters of the police, to the daily papers, to offer a reward ; he went to the cab companies, in short, wherever some glimmer of hope prompted him to call.

She waited the whole day, in the same state of terror at this awful disaster. Loisel came home in the evening, his face pale and drawn ; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you have broken the clasp of

her necklace, and are getting it repaired. That will give us time to look round."

She wrote to his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope. And Loisel, who looked five years older, declared:

"We must see about replacing these jewels."

The next day they took the case which had contained the diamonds, and called on the jeweller whose name it bore. He consulted his books.

"It was not I, madam, who sold this necklace; I must merely have provided the case."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller seeking a necklace similar to the other, trying to remember, both of them ill with misery and anguish.

In a shop of the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which they thought exactly like the one they were seeking. It was worth forty thousand francs. They might have it for thirty-six thousand. They asked the jeweller not to sell it for three days, and they stipulated that it should be taken back for thirty-four thousand francs if the original should be found before the end of February.

Loisel had eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He would borrow the remainder.

He borrowed, a thousand francs from one, five hundred from another, here five louis, there three. He signed promissory notes; raised loans on ruinous terms; had to deal with usurers, with every breed of money-lender. He jeopardized all

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his life to come, risked his signature without any certainty that he could honour it, and, terrified at the anguish which the future held in store, at the dire penury about to fall on him, at the prospect of endless physical privation and moral torture, he went and fetched the new necklace, and laid down on the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Mme Loisel carried the necklace back to Mme Forestier, the latter said, with a slight show of annoyance :

" You should have brought it back sooner ; I might have needed it."

She did not open the case, as her friend feared she would do. If she had discovered the substitution what would she have thought ? What would she have said ? Would she not have taken her for a thief ?

Madame Loisel made acquaintance with the horrible life of those who are hard up. However, she made up her mind to it without flinching, heroically. That dreadful debt must be repaid. She would repay it. The servant was dismissed ; they changed their abode, and rented an attic under the roofs.

She made acquaintance with rough housework, with the sickening drudgery of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, breaking her rosy finger-nails on greasy earthenware and grimy pans. She scrubbed the soiled linen, the shirts and the dish-cloths, and hung them up to dry on a line. Every morning she took down the refuse-box to the street, and brought up the water, stopping at

every landing to take breath. And, clad as one of the people, she went to the fruit-shop, to the grocer's, to the butcher's, her basket on her arm, bargaining, pocketing insults, clinging to every halfpenny of her miserable money.

Every month they had to meet promissory notes, to renew others, and to ask for time. Her husband worked in the evening, writing up the books of a tradesman, and at night he often did engrossing at twopence-halfpenny a folio.

And this life lasted for ten years.

At the end of ten years they had repaid everything, with the usury rates of interest, and the accumulated interest upon interest.

Mme Loisel looked old now. She had become the muscular, hard, rough woman of straitened households. With tousled hair, skirts awry, and red hands, she talked loud as she swilled her floors. But at times, when her husband was at his office, she would sit down by the window and think of that ball of long ago, when she had been so handsome and so much admired. What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? Who knows? What a strange thing is life! How sudden its changes! What a little thing will suffice to work your ruin, or your salvation!

One Sunday, having gone for a stroll to the Champs-Élysées as a relaxation after the week's work, she suddenly caught sight of a woman leading a child. It was Mme Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive. Mme Loisel's heart began to beat fast. Should she

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“speak to her? Indeed yes! Now that she had paid up, she would tell her all. Why not? She went up to her.

“Good afternoon, Jeanne.”

The other did not recognize her, and wondered who this *bourgeoise* might be who addressed her so familiarly. She stammered:

“But, madame . . . I am not . . . You must be mistaken.”

“No. I am Mathilde Loisel.”

Her friend uttered a cry.

“Oh! . . . My poor Mathilde, how you have changed!”

“Yes, I’ve had a bad time of it since I saw you last. I’ve suffered many hardships . . . and all on your account.”

“On my account! What do you mean?”

“You remember that diamond necklace you lent me to go to the Ministry ball?”

“Yes; well?”

“Well, I lost it.”

“How could that be, since you brought it back?”

“I brought you back another one exactly like it. And for ten years we’ve been paying for it. You understand! It was no easy matter for us, who had nothing . . . At last it’s done with, and it’s a relief, I can tell you!”

Mme Forestier had stopped.

“You say that you bought a diamond necklace in place of mine?”

“Yes. You had not noticed it, eh? They were exactly alike!”

And she smiled, a proud and ingenuous smile.

Madame Forestier, with a lump in her throat, took her by both hands.

“ Oh, my poor Mathilde ! Why, mine was paste ! It was worth at the most five hundred francs ! ”

UNCLE JULES

A GREY-BEARDED old beggar asked us for alms. My companion, Joseph Davranche, gave him a five-franc piece, and I showed some surprise. He said to me :

“ The poor wretch brought to my mind a story which I will tell you. Its memory constantly haunts me. Here it is :

“ My family—we are from Havre—was not wealthy. We made both ends meet, and nothing more. My father worked hard and late at his office, for a very small salary. I had two sisters.

“ To my mother our straitened means were a source of much suffering, and for her husband she often found bitter words, veiled and insidious reproaches. The poor man would answer with a gesture which went to my heart. He would pass his open hand over his brow, as if to wipe off imaginary beads of perspiration, and would answer nothing. I could feel his impotent misery.

“ We saved on everything ; we never accepted an invitation to dinner, lest we should have to return the compliment ; we did our shopping on the cheap, always on the look-out for remainders. My sisters made their own dresses, and would hold lengthy consultations over the price of a bit of braid at three halfpence a yard. Our standard dinner was soup off the poorer cuts of beef,

followed by the beef itself done up with every conceivable sauce. This is said to be wholesome and comforting, but I would have preferred something else. I used to get fearful wiggings over a lost button or a tear in my breeches.

“ But every Sunday we paraded on the pier in full dress. My father, frock-coated, top-hatted, and gloved, offered his arm to my mother, who was decked out like a ship on a regatta day. My sisters, who were ready first, awaited the signal for departure ; but at the last moment some forgotten stain was always discovered on the frock-coat of *paterfamilias*, and it had to be rubbed hastily with a rag dipped in benzene. My father, with his tall-hat on his head, waited in his shirt-sleeves until the operation was completed, while my mother made haste, having put on her spectacles—she was short-sighted—and taken off her gloves lest she should spoil them.

“ We would start with much ceremony. My sisters walked in front, arm in arm. They were of an age to be married, and my parents showed them off in town. I walked on my mother’s left, while my father kept to her right, and I recall the pompous air of my poor parents on these Sunday walks, their set faces and severity of carriage. They advanced with grave step, straight-backed and stiff-limbed, as if some matter of extreme importance had depended on their bearing.

“ And every Sunday, when we saw the great ships, just back from unknown and distant lands, coming into harbour, my father invariably spoke these same words :

UNCLE JULES

“ ‘Supposing Jules were on board one of these, hey? what a surprise!’

“Uncle Jules, my father’s brother, was the only hope of the family, after having been its nightmare. I had heard of him since my early childhood, and it seemed to me that I should recognize him at first sight, so familiar had the thought of him become. I knew every detail of his existence up to the day of his departure for America, although that period of his life was always referred to with bated breath.

“It seems that he had misconducted himself, that is to say, he had gone through some money, surely the blackest of crimes in the eyes of penurious families. Among the rich a man who has his fling ‘plays the giddy-goat.’ He is what is smilingly called a gay spark. But in families of slender means a youth who compels his parents to make a hole in their capital becomes a ‘waster,’ a vagabond, a scoundrel. And this distinction is just, although the facts are the same, for the gravity of an action can only be determined by its consequences.

“In short, Uncle Jules had considerably diminished the inheritance upon which my father had counted; and this, after going through every penny of his own share. They had packed him off to America, as was commonly done in these days, on a merchant vessel plying between Havre and New York.

“Once over there, Uncle Jules set up in some trade or other, I forget what, and he soon wrote home that he was earning a little money, and that

he hoped he would be able to indemnify my father for all he had done to his prejudice. This letter created a great impression on the family. Jules, who had hitherto been a 'waster,' suddenly became an honest man, a big-hearted fellow, a true Davranche, upright like all the Davranches. Besides, a sea-captain told us that Jules had rented a large store, and was in a big way of business.

"A second letter, written two years later, said :

" 'My dear Philippe, I am writing lest you should be anxious about my health, which is good. So is business. I am off to-morrow for a long journey to South America. I shall be several years perhaps without sending you any news. If I don't write, do not worry. I shall return to Havre when once I have made my pile. I hope it won't be so very long, and we shall live happily together . . . '

"To this letter the family had pinned their faith. It was read on all occasions, and shown to everybody.

"For ten years, indeed, Uncle Jules was not heard of ; but my father's hopes increased as the time passed, and my mother also would often say :

" 'When dear Jules is home our situation will change. *He's* done well ! '

"And every Sunday, as he saw the big black ships rising on the horizon, vomiting coils of smoke against the sky, my father would repeat for the hundredth time :

" 'Supposing Jules were on board one of these, hey ? what a surprise ! '

UNCLE JULES

“ And we almost expected to see him waving a handkerchief, and to hear him shout :

“ ‘ Hullo, Philippe ! ’

“ We had built plans by the score on the expectation of this sure return ; it was even proposed to build, with the uncle’s money, a small country house near Ingouville. I would not pledge my word that my father had not already started negotiations with regard to it.

“ The elder of my sisters was twenty-eight at this time, the other was twenty-six. They were not married yet, and this was a sad affliction for all. At last a suitor presented himself for the second one. A clerk, ‘ poor but honest.’ I have always been convinced that Uncle Jules’ letter, exhibited one evening, had put an end to the young man’s hesitation, and brought him to the point.

“ He was accepted eagerly, and it was decided that after the marriage the whole family would take a little trip to Jersey.

“ Jersey is the ideal tripping-resort of poor people. It isn’t far ; you cross the sea in a steamer, and you find yourself in a foreign land, since this islet belongs to the English. So that a Frenchman, with two hours’ navigation, can enjoy the sight of a neighbouring people at home, and study the manners—deplorable, be it said—of this island ‘ under the aegis of the British flag,’ as people say who affect simplicity of speech.

“ This trip to Jersey engrossed our thoughts, we lived in expectation of it, we dreamed of it constantly.

“ At last we set off. I can see it all as if it were yesterday : the boat getting up steam alongside the quay at Granville, my father, in a flurry, watching our three trunks being put on board. My mother was flurried, and had taken the arm of my unmarried sister, who seemed lost since the other had left, like the only chick left of its brood. In the background was the newlymarried couple, who always lagged behind, so that I often looked round.

“ The buzzer sounded. We clambered on board, and the boat, leaving the pier, moved away over a sea as smooth as a table-top of green marble. We watched the coast receding, happy and proud like all those who seldom travel. My father spread himself under his frock-coat, all its stains having been carefully rubbed out that very morning, and he cast around him that holiday smell of benzene by which I always knew it was Sunday.

“ Suddenly he caught sight of two elegant ladies, whom two gentlemen were treating to oysters. An old ragged sailor opened the shells with a knife, and handed them to the gentlemen, who then offered them to the ladies. They ate daintily, holding the shell on a cambric handkerchief, and bending forward for fear of staining their dresses. Then they drank the water at one little gulp, and threw the shell into the sea.

“ I suppose my father was much impressed : how distinguished to eat oysters on a sea-trip ! He thought this ‘ classy,’ refined, superior, and he went up to my mother and sisters, asking :

UNCLE JULES

“ ‘ May I offer you a few oysters ? ’ ”

“ My mother hesitated, on account of the expense, but my two sisters accepted at once. My mother, slightly put out, said :

“ ‘ I’m afraid they would not agree with me. Let the young people have some, but not too many, you would make them ill.’ ”

“ Then, turning toward me, she added :

“ ‘ As for Joseph, he needn’t have any ; boys mustn’t be spoilt.’ ”

“ So I remained beside my mother. I thought this distinction unfair. I watched my father, who pompously led his two daughters and his son-in-law toward the old ragged sailor.

“ The two ladies had just departed, and my father was showing my sisters how to eat the oyster without spilling the water. He even undertook to set the example, and took up an oyster. He tried to imitate the ladies, and promptly spilled all the liquid on his frock-coat. I heard my mother murmur :

“ ‘ Why doesn’t he keep quiet ? ’ ”

“ Presently I thought my father looked upset ; he drew back a little, gazed fixedly at his family, grouped round the oyster-man, and suddenly came toward us. I thought him very pale, and his eyes looked strange. Speaking low, he said to my mother :

“ ‘ That man who is opening the oysters is very like Jules. It’s remarkable ! ’ ”

“ My mother, taken aback, asked :

“ ‘ What Jules ? ’ ”

“ My father answered :

“ ‘Why, my brother . . . If I didn’t know him to be doing well in America, I should say it was he.’

“ My mother, startled, stammered :

“ ‘You are mad ! Since you know it isn’t he, why do you talk such nonsense ? ’

“ My father insisted :

“ ‘Do go and look at him, Clarisse ; I would rather you made sure with your own eyes.’

“ She rose and went to join her daughters. I also was looking at the man. He was old, dirty, and wrinkled, and he never lifted his eyes off his work.

“ My mother came back. I saw that she was shaking. She said hurriedly :

“ ‘I think it is he. Go and ask the captain for information. But do be cautious ; we don’t want to have that ne’er-do-well thrown back upon us now ! ’

“ My father departed, and I followed him. I felt strangely moved.

“ The captain, a tall thin man with long whiskers, was pacing the bridge with a look of importance, as if he had been in command of a liner.

“ My father addressed him with due ceremony, questioning him on his profession, and making complimentary remarks. What was the importance of Jersey ? Its produce ? Its population ? Manners and customs ? Nature of the soil ? etc., etc.

“ Just as if the United States of America, at the very least, had been under discussion.

UNCLE JULES

"Then the talk shifted to the boat which we were on, the *Express*, then to the crew. At last my father said nervously :

" ' You have got an old man opening oysters over there, who looks interesting. Do you know anything about him ? ' "

"The captain, who was growing somewhat impatient at this conversation, answered shortly :

" ' He is an old French vagabond whom I came across in America last year, and whom I brought home. It seems he has relatives at Havre, but he won't go back to them, as he owes them money. His name is Jules . . . Jules Darmanche, or Darvanche, something like that. It appears that for a time he was rich over there, but look what he is reduced to now ! ' "

"My father became livid. In a choking voice, and with a vacant expression, he managed to say :

" ' Ah ! ah ! very good, very good ! I'm not astonished . . . Many thanks, captain. ' "

"And he went away, while the sailor gazed after him in amazement.

"He came back to my mother, looking so upset that she said to him :

" ' Sit down, or people will suspect something. ' "

"He sank on to a seat, stammering :

" ' It is he, right enough. ' "

"Then he asked :

" ' What are we to do ? ' "

"She answered quickly :

“ ‘ We must get the youngsters away. Since Joseph knows all about it, he will go for them. Above all, our son-in-law must suspect nothing.’ ”

“ My father appeared absolutely crushed. He murmured :

“ ‘ What a catastrophe ! ’ ”

“ My mother, in an outbreak of fury, added :

“ ‘ I always thought that thief would do no good, and that he would be thrown on our hands again ! As if anything else could be expected of a Davranche ! ’ ”

“ My father passed his hand over his brow, as he always did under his wife’s taunts.

“ She added :

“ ‘ Now give Joseph some money to go and pay for these oysters. Suppose we were recognized by that beggar ! A nice impression it would produce on the boat ! Let us go to the other end, and you must see to it that that man doesn’t come near us.’ ”

“ She got up, and they moved away after handing me a five-franc piece. My sisters, somewhat puzzled, were waiting for my father. I said that my mother was feeling a little sea-sick, and I asked the oyster-man :

“ ‘ How much do we owe you, sir ? ’ ”

“ I should have liked to have said ‘ Uncle.’ ”

“ He answered :

“ ‘ Two francs fifty.’ ”

“ I handed him my five-franc piece, and he gave me back the change. I looked at his hand, a poor, furrowed sailor’s hand ; I looked at his face, a

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pitiable old face, sad and care-worn ; and I said to myself :

“ ‘ That’s my uncle, Father’s brother, my uncle ! ’

“ I gave him ten sous as a tip. He thanked me :

“ ‘ God bless you, my young sir ! ’

“ The tone was that of the poor when they receive alms. It came across my mind that he must have begged, over there. My sisters eyed me, aghast at my generosity.

“ When I handed the two francs to my father, my mother asked with surprise :

“ ‘ Was it three francs ? . . . Surely not ! ’

“ I answered firmly :

“ ‘ I tipped him ten sous. ’

“ My mother jumped, and fixing her eyes on mine :

“ Have you lost your wits ? You gave ten sous to that man, to that vagabond ! . . . ’

“ She stopped as she observed my father’s eye move from her to his son-in-law. Nothing more was said.

“ In front of us, on the horizon, a purple shadow seemed to be rising from the sea. It was Jersey.

“ When we approached the piers, I felt in my heart a keen desire to see Uncle Jules once again, to draw near to him, to say something comforting and tender. But as no more oysters were being consumed he had disappeared ; no doubt the miserable man had gone down to his foul quarters at the bottom of the hold.

"We came home by the Saint-Malo boat, in order not to meet him again. My mother was on tenter-hooks.

"I never saw my father's brother again.

"Now you know why you will sometimes see me give a five-franc piece to a tramp."

HOME SWEET HOME

THE Neuilly tram had just passed the Porte Maillot and was now making its way along the broad avenue which begins at the Seine. The little engine, with its car behind, panted like a runner out of breath, blowing its horn to clear the road before it and spitting forth steam, its pistons making the staccato sound of moving iron legs. The sultry heat of a dying summer's day was beating down on the road, and in the air, although there was no breeze, hung a white, chalky, opaque dust, hot and stifling, which clung to people's damp skins, filled their eyes, and penetrated their lungs. The inhabitants of the houses were coming out on to their doorsteps to get some air. The windows of the tram-car were down, and all the curtains were flapping as the car passed quickly along. Only a few people were sitting inside (for on these hot days the roof or the platforms were preferred). There were portly dames dressed in ridiculous costumes; suburban housewives who made up for the refinement they lacked by an incongruous air of dignity; weary men coming tired from the office, with sallow faces, bodies misshapen, and one shoulder higher than the other from bending for hours over their desks. Their gloomy, anxious faces told of domestic cares, increasing financial

strain, and long-nourished ambitions finally shattered; for one and all belonged to that wretched army of seedy persons who vegetate on their slender resources in mean plaster houses, with one flower-bed for a garden, in the midst of that district on the outskirts of Paris where waste-product factories abound.

Quite close to the door a fat little man, with puffy cheeks and paunch pendulous between his straddling legs, dressed all in black, with a decoration in his coat, was talking to a tall thin man of dilapidated appearance clad in exceedingly dirty white drill and wearing an old panama hat. The former was speaking slowly, and so hesitatingly that he seemed at times to have a stammer; this was M. Caravan, chief clerk at the Admiralty. The other, formerly medical officer on board a merchant vessel, had ended by settling down at Courbevoie Circus, where he practised on the poverty-stricken inhabitants whatever vague medical knowledge remained to him after his life of adventure. His name was Chenet, and he gave himself the title of doctor. There were rumours as to his morality.

M. Caravan had always led the usual life of an official. For thirty years he had never failed to come to his office every morning by the same route, meeting at the same hour, at the same spot, the same men on their way to business; and every evening he came back the same way, again finding the same faces that he had watched growing older.

Every day, after buying his halfpenny paper at

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the corner of the Faubourg St-Honoré, he would go and get himself a couple of rolls. Then he would walk into the Ministry like a guilty man giving himself up to custody, and would go hastily to his office full of anxiety, as if in perpetual expectation of a reprimand for some act of negligence that he might have committed.

Nothing had ever occurred to break the even tenor of his life ; he was unconcerned with any events outside the affairs of the office, promotions, or extra pay. Whether he were at the Ministry or with his family (for he had married a dowerless daughter of a colleague), he never talked of anything but the service. His mind, atrophied by the dull, daily grind, had no longer any thoughts, hopes, or dreams beyond the horizon of the Ministry. But there was one thing which always poisoned the pleasures of his position : the throwing open of the posts of assistant director and director to paymasters—‘ tin merchants,’ as they were called, because of their silver braid—and every evening at dinner he would bring forward for the benefit of his wife, who shared his hatreds, strong arguments to prove that it is iniquitous, from every point of view, to give posts in Paris to people destined for service afloat.

And now he was old, without having felt the years pass, for he had gone straight from school to office, and the ushers who made him tremble of yore were now replaced by the heads of departments, of whom he lived in mortal terror. When he stood on the threshold of these chamber-despots he trembled from head to foot ; and the

outcome of this continual state of fear was an awkward manner, a humble bearing, and a kind of nervous stutter.

His knowledge of Paris was as extensive as that of a blind man whose dog leads him to the same doors every day; and the episodes and scandals reported in his halfpenny paper seemed to him fantastic tales freely invented for the entertainment of people in his walk of life. Being an orderly soul, a reactionary not belonging to any definite party, but opposed to all 'novelties,' he skipped the political news, which his 'rag,' moreover, was paid to distort, in order to promote some particular cause, and every evening as he walked up the Champs-Élysées he would contemplate the surging crowds on foot and the rolling sea of vehicles, like some burdened traveller journeying in a far-distant land.

This year, having completed his thirty years of obligatory service, he had been awarded, on the 1st of January, the cross of the Legion of Honour, which in these Civil Service departments, run as they are on military lines, is the recompense awarded the long and miserable servitude (called "loyal service") of the dreary criminals, chained to their green pasteboard. This unexpected honour, giving him as it did a new and loftier conception of his powers, had wrought a complete transformation in his habits. From that moment he had abandoned coloured trousers and fancy waistcoats, and wore black with a long frock-coat which showed off to greater advantage his 'ribbon'—a very broad ribbon. He shaved

every morning, took greater care of his nails, changed his linen every other day, out of due consideration for the proprieties and respect for the national order in which he played a part, and thus, at a day's notice, he had become a new Caravan, spruce, impressive, condescending. At home he would refer to "my decoration" on every possible occasion. Such pride had entered into his soul that at last he could not endure to see any kind of ribbon whatever in the button-holes of other men. He was immediately incensed by the sight of foreign orders—"They ought not to be allowed to be worn in France"—and he had a special grievance against Dr Chenet, whom he used to meet every evening in the tram, wearing some kind of decoration—white, blue, orange, or green.

The conversation of the two men from the Arc de Triomphe to Neuilly was always the same, and to-day, as on other days, they were at first engaged in discussing various local abuses which shocked both of them, though the Mayor of Neuilly took the matter lightly. Then, as inevitably happens when a medical man is about, Caravan raised the subject of illness, hoping thereby to pick up a little free information, or even advice, by going about it carefully and not allowing the dodge to be seen. As a matter of fact, he had been anxious about his mother for some time past. She often had prolonged fainting fits, and in spite of her ninety years she refused to have treatment. Caravan was moved by the thought of her great age, and was constantly saying to Dr

Chenet : " Do you often see any one get as far as that ? " And he would rub his hands together, happy, not so much because it meant a lot to him that the good woman's life on earth should be indefinitely prolonged, as that his mother's long life was in the nature of a promise for his own.

He continued : " Oh, in my family we wear well ; now take me, I'm sure I shall see a ripe old age, unless I meet with some accident."

The medical officer glanced at him pityingly ; he contemplated for a moment his neighbour's suffused face, fleshy neck, and round paunch, pendulous between fat, flabby legs, all the apoplectic rotundity of the elderly employee out of condition ; and, raising the dingy panama he wore on his head, he replied with a guffaw : " Don't be too sure, old man ; your mother is a poor old skeleton, and you're simply a pot-belly ! "

Caravan, disturbed, said nothing. But the tram was approaching the terminus. The two companions got out, and M. Chenet treated the other to a glass of vermouth at the Globe Café, which both of them frequented. The proprietor, a friend, held out two fingers to them across the bottles on the counter, and they went and joined three domino enthusiasts who had been sitting there since noon. Friendly words passed between them, and the invariable query, " What's the news ? " After which the players resumed their game and the others bade them good-night. They held out their hands without looking up, and the two went home to their dinners. Caravan lived near the Courbevoie Circus in a small two-storied

house, the ground floor of which was occupied by a hairdresser. The entire flat consisted of two bedrooms, a dining-room, and a kitchen, and the rickety furniture wandered from one room to another, according to requirement. Mme Caravan spent her time cleaning the apartment, while her daughter Marie-Louise, aged twelve, and her son Philippe-Auguste, aged nine, romped about in the gutters of the avenue, with all the street-urchins of the neighbourhood.

Above him Caravan had installed his mother, whose avarice was famous among the neighbours, and who was so thin that they declared the Almighty had carried out on her person her own principles of parsimony. Her temper was habitually bad, and not a day passed without some quarrel or violent fit of rage. From her window she arraigned the neighbours on their doorsteps, the street-sellers, the crossing-sweepers, and the urchins, who would take their revenge by following her at a distance when she went out, calling after her, "Old Wet-the-bed!"

A little Norman servant, stupid beyond all belief, did the housework, and slept on the second floor next the old woman, for fear of an accident.

When Caravan came in, his wife, whose chronic zest for cleaning amounted to a disease, was polishing with a bit of flannel the mahogany chairs scattered about the empty rooms. She always wore cotton gloves, and on her head a cap with many-coloured ribbons that was perpetually slipping down over one ear. Every time she was caught polishing, brushing, beeswaxing,

or scouring, she would say : " As I'm not rich, everything in my house is plain, but I have one luxury, and that's cleanliness, which is as good as any other."

With her stubborn common sense, she was her husband's guide in all things. Every evening at table, and later in bed, they would discuss lengthily the affairs of the office, and although she was twenty years his junior he confided in her as though she were his director of conscience, and followed her advice in everything. She had never been pretty, and she was ugly now, small in build and skinny. Her clumsiness in dressing herself had always had the effect of obliterating her few feminine charms, which a well-planned costume would have made the most of. Her skirts seemed to be perpetually twisted to one side, and she was for ever scratching herself, no matter where she was nor in whose company, from a kind of uncontrolled habit that was almost St Vitus' Dance. The only adornment she allowed herself consisted of an abundance of silk ribbons, decorating the elaborate caps she was accustomed to wear in the house.

As soon as she saw her husband appear she got up and, kissing his side-whiskers, said, " Did you remember Potin, my dear ? " (It was an errand he had promised to do.) But he sank down on to a chair in dismay—he had forgotten, for the fourth time. " It's fate," he said, " it's fate ; I remember it all day, but what's the use ? In the evening I always forget ! " As he seemed really in despair, she consoled him by saying : " Oh,

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well, you'll think of it to-morrow. No news at the Ministry ? ”

“ Yes — something important — another ‘ tin merchant ’ appointed assistant director.”

She became very grave. “ Which department ? ”

“ The purchases department.”

She was annoyed at this. “ In Ramon's place, then, just the very one I wanted you to have ; and what about Ramon ? has he retired ? ”

“ He's retired,” faltered her husband.

She lost her temper, and her cap fell over one ear as she exclaimed : “ That's the end, mind you ; there's no hope now in that hole of a place. And what's his name, this commissioner of yours ? ”

“ Bonassot.”

She took up the Navy List, which she always kept at hand, and looked up “ Bonassot—Toulon —Born 1851—Probationer 1871, assistant paymaster 1875.” “ Has the fellow ever been to sea ? ”

This question restored Caravan's calm, and a merry thought made him shake with suppressed laughter. “ Yes, like Balin—just like his boss, Balin.” And, laughing louder, he repeated an old joke which was the delight of the whole Ministry : “ It wouldn't do to send them by water to inspect the Naval Station at Point-du-Jour, they'd be seasick on the Seine steamer ! ”

She, however, remained as solemn as though she had not heard, and then murmured as she slowly scratched her chin : “ If only we had an M.P. up our sleeve ! When Parliament knows

the sort of thing that's going on in that place the Minister will have a fit——”

From the staircase came shouts, interrupting her sentence. Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste were returning from the gutter, slapping and kicking each other all the way up the stairs. Their mother rushed out furiously, and, seizing an arm of each of them, she flung them into the flat, shaking them violently. Directly they caught sight of their father they hurled themselves on him. He kissed them affectionately and repeatedly, then sat down, took them on his knee, and began to chat with them.

Philippe-Auguste was an ugly little brat, dirty from head to foot, with tousled hair, and the face of a half-wit. Marie-Louise already took after her mother, talked like her, repeated her sayings, and even imitated her gestures. She too said: “What news at the Ministry?” He answered gaily: “Your friend Ramon, who comes to dinner here once a month, is leaving us, girly. There's a new assistant director in his place.”

She looked up at her father and said, with the understanding sympathy of a precocious child: “Ah, so that's another one who's got ahead of you!”

He stopped laughing and made no reply; then, to change the subject, he turned to his wife, who was now cleaning the windows. “Is Mother getting on all right upstairs?”

Mme Caravan stopped polishing, turned round, straightened her cap, which had slipped quite down her back, and with trembling lips

said: "Ah, yes, let's have a word about your mother! She's played a nice trick on me! What do you think she did? Mme Lebaudin, the hair-dresser's wife, came up a little while ago to borrow a packet of starch, and as I was out your mother chased her away just as though she were a beggar. But I gave the old woman what for. She pretended not to hear, as she always does when she's told some home truths, but she's no more deaf than I am, I tell you; it's all bunkum, and the proof is that she went straight off to her room again without a word."

Caravan was embarrassed and held his tongue; at this moment the little maid hurried in to say dinner was ready. He took a broom handle that always stood hidden in a corner and knocked three times on the ceiling as a signal to his mother. Then he went into the dining-room, and Mme Caravan junior served the soup, while they waited for the old lady. She did not come, and the soup was getting cold. Then they began to eat, very slowly; finally their plates were empty, and still she had not come. Mme Caravan, in a rage, took her husband to task. "She does it on purpose, I tell you, and of course you always stand up for her."

Greatly perplexed by his position as buffer between the two, he sent Marie-Louise to fetch Grandma, and sat quite still, with downcast eyes, while his wife angrily tapped the bottom of her glass with the end of her knife.

Suddenly the door opened and the child came in, alone, panting for breath, and deathly pale;

she said very quickly: "Grandma has fallen down."

Caravan sprang up, threw his napkin down on the table, and dashed upstairs with heavy, resounding footsteps, while his wife, who was sure this was a malicious trick on the part of her mother-in-law, followed in a more leisurely fashion, scornfully shrugging her shoulders.

The old woman was stretched full length, face downward, in the middle of the room, and when her son had turned her over she lay there, motionless, withered, with yellow, wrinkled, leathery skin, closed eyes, and clenched teeth, her lean body rigid in every limb. Caravan, on his knees beside her, kept groaning: "My poor mother! my poor mother!" But the other Mme Caravan, after studying her for a minute, declared: "Pooh! it's only another of her fainting fits, that's all; it's just to stop us from having our dinner, you may be sure."

They laid the body on the bed, took off all the clothes, and began, all of them, Caravan, his wife, and the maid, to rub her. In spite of all their efforts, she did not regain consciousness. Then Rosalie was sent to fetch Dr Chenet. He lived on the quay in the direction of Suresnes. It was a long way off, and they had to wait some time. At last he arrived, and after examining, handling, and sounding the old lady announced: "It's all over."

Caravan sank down on the corpse, shaken by violent sobs, imprinting convulsive kisses on his mother's stiffened features, and weeping such

floods of tears that great drops rained down on the dead woman's face.

Mme Caravan junior was suitably overcome by grief, and, standing behind her husband, uttered low groans and rubbed her eyes with determination.

Caravan suddenly got to his feet, his features swollen, his sparse hair ruffled, very ugly in his genuine affliction. "But are you sure, doctor? Are you quite sure?"

The medical officer came up quickly, and handling the corpse with professional dexterity, like a merchant displaying the merits of his wares, said: "See here, my friend—look at the eye." He raised the eyelid, and the old woman's look returned under his finger, entirely unaltered, except perhaps for a slight dilatation of the pupil. Caravan felt his heart stand still, and a shiver of terror ran through his frame. Monsieur Chenet took hold of the tense arm, forced open the fingers and said in an angry tone, as though some one were contradicting him: "Just look at this hand; I never make a mistake—don't you worry."

Caravan again fell in a heap upon the bed, almost bellowing, while his wife, still snivelling, did what was necessary; she drew up the night table, spread a napkin on it, placed on that four candles which she lit, took a branch of box from behind the mirror over the mantelpiece, and placed it between the candles in a dish, which she filled with clean water as she had no holy water. But after a moment's hasty reflection she threw a

pinch of salt into the water, doubtless imagining that she was thereby accomplishing a kind of consecration.

When she had completed the ritual dues of death she stood there motionless. Then the medical officer, who had helped her to arrange the various articles, said softly to her: "We must get Caravan away."

She made a gesture of assent, and went to her husband, who was still on his knees, sobbing, and raised him by one arm, while Monsieur Chenet took him by the other. First they made him sit down on a chair, and his wife kissed him on the forehead and reasoned with him. The medical officer reinforced his arguments, counselling firmness, courage, resignation—all the things that are so impossible in such devastating calamities. Then they both took him once more by the arms and led him away. He was sobbing like a great baby, with spasmodic gulps; with his arms hanging, his legs limp, he was completely unstrung, and went down the stairs unconscious of what he was doing, moving his feet mechanically. They sat him in the armchair he always used at table, in front of his plate, empty save for his spoon and a little soup, and there he remained, without a single movement, his eye fixed on his glass, so stunned that his mind was a blank.

Mme Caravan, in a corner, was chatting with the doctor, getting information about the formalities to be gone through, asking all kinds of practical details. At last M. Chenet, who appeared to be expecting something, took up his hat and pre-

pared to make his farewells, announcing that he had not had dinner.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you've not had dinner? Oh, but do stay, doctor; you must take pot-luck with us; you'll understand, of course, that we shan't have much of a meal."

He made some excuse; she insisted. "Nonsense! You must stay. At such a time one is glad to have the company of friends; and, besides, you may perhaps persuade my husband to cheer up a bit: he badly needs to pull himself together."

The doctor bowed, and put his hat down again. "In that case, I'll accept."

She gave orders to the bewildered Rosalie, then sat down to table herself, "Just to make a show of eating," as she said, "to keep the doctor company."

They had some more cold soup. M. Chenet asked for a second helping. Then came a dish of Lyons tripe, exhaling an odour of onions, which Mme Caravan made up her mind to taste.

"It's excellent," said the doctor. She smiled. "Yes, isn't it?" Then, turning to her husband, "Do have a bit, Alfred, my poor dear, if only to put something solid inside you; think of the night you've got before you!"

Meekly he held out his plate, just as he would have gone off to bed if he had been told to, obedient in everything without resistance or thought. So he ate.

The doctor, who was looking after himself, took three helpings, while Mme Caravan from time to time picked up a fat morsel on the end of

her fork and swallowed it with a kind of studied abstraction. When a tureen full of macaroni appeared the doctor murmured: "By Jove, here's a treat!" And this time Mme Caravan helped them all. She even filled the saucers from which the children were eating messily; left to themselves, they were drinking their wine neat, and were already beginning to kick at each other under the table.

M. Chenet recalled Rossini's taste for the Italian dish, and suddenly exclaimed: "Hullo! that rhymes! one might start a poem:

Master Rossini,
He loved macaroni."

No one listened to him. Mme Caravan, grown suddenly meditative, was considering all the probable consequences of the event; her husband sat rolling little balls of bread in his fingers, which he presently placed on the cloth and gazed at with a fixed, idiotic stare. He was so devoured by thirst that he kept on filling up his glass, and his mind, already unhinged by the shock and grief, was beginning to wander, and seemed to be reeling in the sudden giddiness due to the painful first stages of digestion.

The doctor, too, was drinking like a fish, and visibly getting intoxicated; even Mme Caravan was feeling the effects of the reaction that follows any nervous disturbance. She was growing restless and excited herself, though she drank nothing but water, and was aware of a certain cloudiness in the head.

Monsieur Chenet had begun to tell deathbed stories which seemed to him comic. For in such a Parisian suburb, where the population is entirely provincial, one meets with the same indifference as that of the peasant in the presence of a dead person—be it his own father or mother—the same irreverence, the same unconscious barbarism so common in the country, so rare in Paris.

“Now last week I was sent for to Puteaux Street, and I hurried off and found the sick man already gone, while the family sat round his bedside quietly finishing a bottle of aniseed they had bought the evening before to satisfy a whim of the dying man.”

But Mme Caravan, still thinking about the will, was not listening, and Caravan’s brain was too blank to understand anything.

Coffee was served, very strong, to give them moral support. Each cup with its dash of cognac made the blood rush to their faces and brought final confusion to their already wavering intelligence.

Then the doctor suddenly seized the brandy bottle and poured a little into each cup, “to wash them out”; and then, speechless, sunk in the gentle glow of digestive torpor, possessed, in spite of themselves, by that physical well-being which alcohol after dinner produces, they slowly savoured the sweet cognac that lay in a yellowish syrup at the bottom of their cups.

The children had fallen asleep, and Rosalie put them to bed.

Then Caravan, in mechanical obedience to the impulse that urges people in trouble to drug themselves, took several more glasses of brandy ; and his vacant eye gleamed.

The doctor at length got up to go, and, taking his friend by the arm, said : " Come along, come with me ; a little fresh air will do you good ; when one is in trouble one mustn't sit still."

The other obeyed meekly, put on his hat, took his stick, and went out ; and they both went arm in arm down toward the Seine, under the bright stars.

Fragrant scents came wafting on the warm night air, for at this season all the gardens of the neighbourhood were full of flowers, and their perfume, asleep during the day, seemed to awake with the approach of evening and mingle their breath with the light breezes stirring in the dusk.

The broad avenue lay silent and deserted, with its double row of gas-lamps, stretching as far as the Arc de Triomphe. From over yonder came the hum of Paris, bathed in a red haze. It was a kind of incessant rumbling, which seemed, from time to time, to be answered from the distant plains by the whistle of a train, approaching full steam or vanishing across country to the coast.

The fresh air, fanning the faces of the two men, took them at first by surprise, upsetting the doctor's balance and accentuating the giddiness which had attacked Caravan since dinner. He walked as if in a dream, his mind benumbed, paralysed ; he had no sharp sense of grief, but was held in a kind of soul torpor which prevented

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him from suffering, and he even experienced a certain relief, which was increased by the warm scents pervading the night.

When they reached the bridge they turned to the right, and the river sent a puff of cool air in their faces. It flowed on, melancholy and serene, screened by tall poplars, and the stars seemed to swim in its waters, carried along by the current. A fine white mist rising from the opposite bank brought to their lungs a dank odour, and Caravan stopped suddenly, struck by this smell of the river, which stirred within him very ancient memories.

And he suddenly saw his mother again, as in former days, in his own childhood, kneeling down in front of their door, over yonder in Picardy, and washing the pile of linen beside her in the thin stream that ran through their garden. He heard the sound of her linen-beater in the calm silence of the countryside, and her voice calling, "Alfred, bring me the soap." And he smelt this same smell of running water, this same mist rising from drenched soil, this marsh vapour, the flavour of which remained with him, unforgettable, returning to him on this very evening, when his mother had just died.

He stood still, shaken by a fresh storm of grief. It was as though a blaze of light had lit up in a single flash the whole extent of his misfortune ; and by meeting that wandering breath he was flung into a black abyss of incurable sorrow. He felt his heart torn by eternal separation. His life was cut in two, and his whole youth was disappearing into the grave with the dead woman.

All the 'old times' were over; all the memories of adolescence were vanishing away; there would no longer be any one to talk to him of former things, of the people he used to know, of his part of the country, of himself, of the intimate details of his past life. That part of his being had ceased to exist; it was now the turn of the other to die.

And then began the procession of images evoked from bygone days. Once again he saw his mother, young, dressed in the gowns that used to wear out on her back and seemed inseparable from her person, so long did she keep them; he recalled her in a thousand forgotten circumstances; with faded outlines, there came to him her gestures, her intonations, her habits, her whims, her tempers, the lines of her face, the movements of her thin fingers, all the well-known postures that she would never again adopt. Clinging to the doctor, he groaned, and his limp knees trembled, while the whole of his plump body shook with sobs as he faltered: "My poor mother! my poor, poor mother!"

But his companion, who was still drunk and longed to finish the evening in certain secret haunts of his, became impatient at this sharp attack of sorrow, and made him sit down on the grass by the riverside, where he left him almost immediately on the pretext of having to see a patient.

Caravan wept for a long time. Then, when he had no more tears to shed, and when all his suffering had run out, as it were, he experienced once more a relief, a respite, a sudden serenity.

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The moon had risen and was bathing the horizon in its tranquil light. The tall poplars stood erect, shot with silver gleams, and the mist over the plain was like falling snow ; the river, in which the stars had ceased to swim, seemed filmed with mother-of-pearl as it flowed ever onward, ruffled by shimmering ripples. The air was mild, the breeze fragrant. A languor was stealing over the slumbering country, and Caravan drank in the sweetness of the night ; he took long breaths, and seemed to be penetrated in every fibre by a freshness, a serenity, a consolation more than human. Nevertheless, he resisted this feeling of well-being that was stealing over him, and kept saying : " My mother ! my poor mother ! " inciting himself to tears from a kind of sense of duty ; but he could no longer manage it, and he actually felt no pang of sorrow at the thoughts which just now had made him weep so violently.

Then he got up to go home, walking slowly, wrapped in the calm indifference of tranquil nature, his heart at peace in spite of himself.

When he reached the bridge he caught sight of the lamp of the last tram, just about to start, and behind it the lighted windows of the *Globe Café*.

Then he felt a sudden need to tell some one about his calamity, to excite sympathy, to make himself interesting. He put on a grief-stricken expression, pushed open the door of the *café*, and went up to the counter, where the proprietor was still sitting enthroned. He expected a sensation,

that everybody would get up and come toward him with outstretched hands : " Why, what's the matter with you ? " But no one noticed the misery written on his countenance. So he leaned upon the counter, bowed his head in his hands, and murmured, " Oh, my God ! Oh, my God ! "

The proprietor watched him. " Are you ill, Monsieur Caravan ? "

" No," he answered ; " alas, no—but my mother has just died."

The other emitted an abstracted " Oh ! " and as a customer at the bottom of the room was calling, " A bitter, please ! " he answered immediately in stentorian tones : " Right you are—it's coming ! " and dashed off to serve him, leaving Caravan stunned.

At the same table as before dinner sat the three domino enthusiasts, still playing, absorbed and motionless. Caravan went up to them in search of sympathy. As none of them seemed to notice him, he resolved to speak to them. " I've just met with a great misfortune," he said. All three raised their heads slightly at the same moment, but kept their eyes fixed on the game they were in the middle of. " Really ? What's happened ? "

" My mother has just died."

One of them murmured, " I say ! " with that false air of dismay adopted by the indifferent. Another, finding nothing to say, shook his head and gave forth a kind of mournful whistle. The third turned to the game once more, as if to say, " Is that all ? "

Caravan was hoping for a word of sympathy

of the kind that is said to come "from the heart." Finding himself received thus, he went away indignant at their composure in the presence of a friend in grief, albeit that grief at this very moment had died down to such an extent that he scarcely felt it any longer.

He went out. His wife was awaiting him, in her nightdress, sitting in a low chair by the open window, still thinking of the will.

"Get undressed," she said, "and we'll talk when we're in bed."

He looked up at the ceiling, motioning. "But—upstairs—there's no one there."

"Excuse *me*, Rosalie is with her, and you're to take her place at three o'clock, when you've had a nap."

He kept his pants on, however, so as to be ready for anything that might happen, and tying a silk handkerchief round his head, joined his wife, who had just slipped between the sheets.

They sat up for some time, side by side. She was thinking. Her cap, even at this hour of the night, was adorned by a pink bow and was half over one ear, as though in accordance with the incurable habit of all the caps she wore. Suddenly she turned toward him, saying: "Do you know whether your mother has made a will?"

He hesitated. "I—I—don't think so. No, of course she hasn't made one."

Mme Caravan looked her husband full in the face and said in low, furious tones: "It's a shame, I tell you; here have we been pinching and scraping for the last ten years to take care of

her, house her, feed her ! Your sister, now, *she* wouldn't have done as much for her, and no more would I if I'd known how she'd pay me back ! Yes, it's a shameful blot on her memory ! You'll say she paid for her board : that's true, but it's not money that can repay your children's care ; you remember them in your will, after you're dead. That's how decent folk behave. As for me, all I've got for it is my toil and trouble. Oh, it's a nice business, that it is ! ”

Caravan, in dismay, kept on saying : “ My dear, my dear, please—I beg you ! ”

In the end she calmed down and returned in her normal tone : “ To-morrow morning your sister must be told.”

He was startled. “ Of course—I hadn't thought of it. The first thing in the morning I'll send a telegram.”

But she interrupted him, with the air of a woman who has provided for all contingencies. “ No, don't send it till ten or eleven, so as to give ourselves time to turn round before she comes. To get from Charenton here won't take her more than a couple of hours at the most. We'll say you lost your head. If we let her know during the morning, we shan't be hauled over the coals.”

But Caravan clapped his hand to his forehead, and said in the timid voice he always used when speaking of his chief, the very thought of whom made him quake : “ We shall have to let them know at the Ministry, too.”

She replied : “ Why let them know ? On occasions of this sort one's always excused for for-

getting. Don't let them know ; take my word for it, your chief won't be able to say anything to you, and you'll put him in a nice hole."

"Why, yes, so I shall," he said, "and in a nice temper when he doesn't see me appear. Yes, you're right ; it's a jolly good idea. When I announce that my mother is dead he won't be able to say anything."

Delighted with the jest, the clerk rubbed his hands at the thought of his chief's face, while above him the body of the old woman lay beside the sleeping servant.

Mme Caravan grew thoughtful, as though pre-occupied by some matter that was difficult to speak about. At length she made up her mind. "Am I right in thinking that your mother gave you her clock — the girl with the cup and ball ?"

He thought for a moment and then said : "Yes, yes ; she said to me (it was a long time ago, when she came to us)—she said to me : 'That clock shall be yours, if you take proper care of me.'"

Mme Caravan, reassured, grew calm. "Very well, then, we must go and fetch it, because, once we let your sister come, she'll stop *us* from taking it."

He hesitated. "Do you think——"

She got angry. "Certainly I think so ; once it's here, no one's any the wiser ; it's ours. It's the same with the chest of drawers in her room, the one with the marble top ; she gave it to me one day when she was in a good temper. We'll bring it down at the same time."

Caravan seemed incredulous. "But, my dear, it's a big responsibility."

She turned on him, furious. "Oh, indeed! So you'll never be any different? You'd let your children starve to death rather than take any action. Once she's given me the chest, it's ours, isn't it? And if your sister doesn't like it, she can just say so—to me! I don't care a straw for your sister. Come along, get up, and let's fetch what your mother has given us, without more ado."

Trembling and defeated, he got out of bed, and was going to put on his trousers when she stopped him. "It's not worth while your dressing—keep your pants on; that's enough. I shall go as I am, too."

And both of them, in their night attire, went off, noiselessly climbed the stairs, opened the door cautiously, and went into the bedroom, where the four lighted candles, around the plate containing the blessed branch, seemed to keep sole vigil by the old woman in her rigid repose; for Rosalie, lying full length in her armchair, her legs stretched out, her hands crossed on her skirt, her head fallen on one side, motionless too and with mouth open, lay snoring gently as she slept.

Caravan took the clock. It was one of those grotesque objects produced in quantities by the artistic taste of the 'Empire.' A girl in bronze gilt, her head adorned with various flowers, was holding in her hand a cup and ball, the latter serving as pendulum.

"Give me that," said his wife, "and take the marble top of the chest." He obeyed, panting,

and balanced the marble with considerable difficulty on his shoulder. Then the couple set out. Caravan stooped in the doorway and tremblingly began to go downstairs, while his wife, walking backward, lighted him with one hand, and carried the clock under the other arm.

When they got back she heaved a great sigh. "That's the chief part over," she said. "Let's go and fetch the rest."

But the drawers of the chest were quite full of the old lady's things. These had to be hidden away somewhere. Mme Caravan had an idea. "Just go and get the pinewood chest in the vestibule; it's not worth a couple of francs, and we can easily put it here." And when the chest had arrived they began the transfer. One after the other they removed the cuffs, collars, chemises, caps, all the bits of things belonging to the good woman lying there behind them, and arranged them methodically in the wooden chest, so as to deceive Mme Braux, the other child of the deceased, who was to arrive next day.

When it was done they first took down the drawers, then the body of the piece of furniture, each holding one end; and both tried for some time to find the best place for it; they decided on the bedroom, opposite the bed, between the two windows. The chest of drawers once in position, Mme Caravan filled it with her own linen. The clock stood on the sitting-room mantelpiece; and the couple studied the general effect. They were at once delighted with it. "That looks very well," said she. He replied,

"Yes, very well." Then they went to bed. She blew out the candle, and soon everybody was asleep on both floors of the house.

It was full daylight when Caravan opened his eyes. His head was confused when he first woke, and he only recalled what had taken place after a few minutes. The remembrance of it struck a great blow in his heart, and he sprang from bed, once more deeply moved and ready to weep.

He went quickly up to the room overhead where Rosalie, who had not waked once all night, still slept, in the same position as on the previous evening. He sent her back to her work, replaced the burnt-out candles, then gazed at his mother, his brain busy with those semblances of deep thoughts, those religious and philosophic commonplaces which occupy the average mind in the presence of death.

But his wife was calling him, and he went downstairs. She had drawn up a list of things to be done during the morning, and she handed him a catalogue which filled him with horror.

He read :

1. Inform the *mairie*.
2. See about a death-certificate.
3. Order a coffin.
4. Call at the church.
5. See the funeral undertakers.
6. Printers—to fetch the notices.
7. Lawyer.
8. Telegraph office to inform family.

Plus a host of minor errands. Then he took his hat and went out.

But by now the news had spread, and the neighbours began to arrive, asking to see the dead woman. At the hairdresser's, on the ground floor, the matter had even been the cause of a scene between the wife and the husband while he was shaving a customer. The wife murmured as she knitted a stocking: "One less in the world, and a miser, that old woman, such as you don't often meet with. I didn't care much for her, certainly, but all the same I shall have to go and see her." The husband muttered as he soaped his patient's chin: "Did you ever hear such nonsense? There's nothing like women for these notions! Not enough that they pester you when they're alive, but they can't even leave you alone after death." But his spouse unconcernedly replied: "I can't help myself; I simply must go. It's haunted me since this morning. If I didn't see her I believe I should be thinking about her all my life. But once I've had a good look at her, so as to fix her face in my mind, I shall be satisfied." The wielder of the razor shrugged his shoulders and confided to the gentleman whose cheek he was scraping: "What do you think these females 'll come out with next? *I'm* not one to find any fun in seeing a dead body!" But his wife had heard, and replied unmoved: "Well, that's how it is; that's how it is." Then putting down her knitting on the counter, she went up to the first floor.

Two neighbours had already come in and were discussing the misfortune with Mme Caravan, who was giving them all the details. A move

was made toward the death-chamber. The four women entered with stealthy tread, sprinkled the sheet, one after the other, with the salt water, knelt and made the sign of the cross as they muttered a prayer, then got up and gazed long at the corpse, with round eyes and mouths half open, while the daughter-in-law of the deceased, with a handkerchief over her face, simulated a heart-broken sob.

When she turned round to go out she perceived Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste standing near the door, both half dressed, and looking on with curiosity. At that the grief produced to order was forgotten, and she rushed at them, her hand raised, shouting angrily : " Will you be off, you rascally imps ! "

She came up again ten minutes later with another batch of neighbours, and when she had once again shaken the box-branch over her mother-in-law, prayed, snivelled, fulfilled all her duties, she found the two children there again together behind her. She cuffed them once more from a sense of duty ; but the next time she took no notice, and each time visitors came the two little creatures followed, kneeling down in a corner and always imitating everything they saw their mother do.

By the beginning of the afternoon the crowd of inquisitive neighbours thinned away. Soon no one else came. Mme Caravan, back in her own apartment, busied herself with the preparations for the funeral ceremony, and the dead woman remained in solitude.

HOME SWEET HOME

The bedroom window was open. An intense heat was coming in, together with clouds of dust ; the flame of the four candles flickered beside the motionless body ; and on the sheet, and the face with its closed eyes, and the two hands stretched out, little flies were crawling to and fro, ceaselessly moving, visiting the old lady in expectation of their approaching hour.

But Marie-Louise and Philippe-Auguste had gone off again to play about in the avenue. They were soon surrounded by their comrades, especially the little girls, always more wide awake to scent all the mysteries of life. And they too inquired, like the grown-ups : " Has your grandma died ? " " Yes, yesterday evening." " What's a dead person like ? " And Marie-Louise would explain, describing the candles, the branch of box, the face. Then all the children were possessed by a deep curiosity, and they too asked to go up to the bedroom of the deceased.

Thereupon Marie-Louise organized a first expedition of five girls and two boys, the biggest and boldest. She made them take off their shoes so as not to be found out ; the band filed into the house, and went lightly up the stairs like an army of mice.

Once in the bedroom the little girl directed the ritual, in imitation of her mother. Solemnly she conducted her comrades, knelt, made the sign of the cross, moved her lips, got up, aspersed the bed, and as the children, huddled close together, came nearer, frightened, curious, and enthralled, to gaze at the face and the hands, she began

suddenly to simulate sobs, hiding her eyes in her little handkerchief. Then, swiftly finding comfort in the thought of those who were waiting outside the door, she ran out, leading them all after her, only to bring back directly another group, and then a third ; for all the ragamuffins of the district, down to the little beggars in rags, were gathering for this novel entertainment ; and each time she reproduced her mother's mummeries to absolute perfection.

In the end she grew weary. The children ran off to another game, and the old grandmother was left alone, quite forgotten by everybody.

Shadows filled the room, and over her dry, wrinkled visage the flickering flame of the candles sent dancing gleams.

At about eight o'clock Caravan came up, shut the window, and renewed the candles. He came in quite calmly now, already accustomed to think of the corpse as though it had lain there for months. He even noticed that no decomposition had as yet set in, and he remarked on the fact to his wife just as they were sitting down to dinner. She replied : " Why, she's made of wood ; she'd keep for a year."

They drank their soup without exchanging a word. The children, left to themselves all day, and dropping with fatigue, dozed in their chairs, and every one else sat silent.

Suddenly the lamp grew dim. Mme Caravan at once turned up the wick, but the apparatus gave out a hollow sound like a prolonged gurgle, and the light went out. They had forgotten to buy oil!

It would delay dinner to go to the grocer's, so they hunted for candles ; but there were none left except those that had been lighted on the night table upstairs.

Mme Caravan, quick in her decisions, at once sent Marie-Louise to fetch two of them while they waited in darkness.

The footsteps of the little girl were distinctly heard as she went up the stairs. Then there was silence for a few moments ; and then the child came hurriedly down again. She opened the door, scared and far more upset than on the previous evening, when she had announced the catastrophe. She murmured in a choked voice : " Oh, Papa, Grandma is getting dressed ! "

Caravan gave such a start that his chair rebounded against the wall. He stuttered : " What's that ? What are you talking about ? "

But Marie-Louise, stifled by emotion, repeated : " Grand—Grand—Grandma is dressing—she's coming down."

He rushed wildly to the stairs, followed by his bewildered wife ; at the door of the upper flat he stopped, shaking with terror, not daring to enter. What was he about to see ? Mme Caravan, the bolder of the two, turned the handle and went into the bedroom.

The room seemed to have become darker, and in the centre a tall thin form was moving about. The old lady was up, and in waking out of her lethargical sleep, even before consciousness had completely returned, she had turned on her side, raising herself on one elbow, and had blown out

three of the candles which were burning beside the deathbed. Then, regaining her strength, she had got up to fetch her clothes. She had been disturbed at first by the absence of her chest of drawers, but gradually she had found all her belongings in the bottom of the wooden coffer, and had quietly dressed. Having next emptied the plate filled with water, put the branch of box back behind the mirror, and replaced the chairs, she was ready to go downstairs, when her son and daughter-in-law appeared.

Caravan rushed up, and, seizing her by the hands, kissed her, with tears in his eyes, while his wife, behind him, said with a hypocritical air: "Oh, what a good thing! what a good thing!"

But the old woman, without softening, without even appearing to understand, rigid as a statue, her eye stony, merely inquired: "Is dinner nearly ready?"

He stammered, losing his head: "Why, yes, Mamma; we were waiting for you." And with unwonted alacrity he took her arm, while Mme Caravan junior seized the candle and lighted them, going downstairs before them, backward, and one step at a time, just as she had done the night before, with her husband carrying the marble slab.

At the first floor she almost bumped into some people who were coming up. It was the Charenton family, Mme Braux followed by her husband.

The wife, a tall fat woman with a dropsical paunch that threw the upper part of her body backward, stared with frightened eyes, prepared

for flight. The husband, a socialistic shoemaker, a little man, hairy to his nostrils, just like a monkey, murmured unconcernedly: "Hullo! what's this? Has she resurrected?"

As soon as Mme Caravan recognized them she made desperate signs to them; then said aloud: "Why, here you are! What a pleasant surprise!"

But Mme Braux, in bewilderment, did not understand and replied under her breath: "It was your telegram that brought us; we thought it was all over."

Her husband, behind her, pinched her to silence her, then added, smothering a malicious chuckle in his thick beard, "It was very nice of you to ask us. We came at once," with an allusion to the long-standing hostility between the two households.

Then, as the old lady was almost down the stairs, he came briskly forward and rubbed his hairy face against her cheek, shouting in her ear, as if she were deaf: "You're quite well, Mother? Still alive and kicking, eh?"

Mme Braux, in her amazement at seeing the person she had expected to find dead alive and well, did not even dare to kiss her; and her immense stomach blocked the whole landing, preventing the others from coming forward.

The old lady, disturbed and suspicious, but never saying a word, looked at all these people around her, and her small grey eye, watchful and hard, was fixed first on one, then on another, full of visible thoughts which embarrassed her children.

Caravan said in explanation : " She hasn't been very well, but she's all right now, quite all right, aren't you, Mother ? "

The good woman, moving forward again, replied in her broken voice, that seemed to come from a distance : " It was a seizure ; I heard you all the time."

An awkward silence ensued. They went into the sitting-room, and sat down to a dinner that had been improvised in a few moments. Monsieur Braux alone kept his countenance. His gorilla face was distorted maliciously, and he kept bringing out innuendoes that plainly disconcerted everybody.

Every other minute the hall-door bell sounded ; and Rosalie, in despair, would come to fetch Caravan, who would dash out, flinging his napkin down. His brother-in-law asked him if this were his at-home day, but he stammered : " No, just messages, nothing at all important."

Then, when a parcel was brought in, he stupidly opened it, and bereavement notices, edged in black, appeared. Blushing to the whites of his eyes, he closed the envelope again and plunged it in his waistcoat pocket. His mother had not seen it. She was staring fixedly at her clock with the gilt cup and ball swinging to and fro on the mantelpiece. And the embarrassment increased, amidst a glacial silence.

Then turning her wrinkled witch's face toward her daughter, the old lady's eye sparkled with a gleam of malice as she uttered these words : " On Monday you can bring your little girl to me ; I

want to see her." Mme Braux's face lit up, and she cried : " Yes, Mamma," while Mme Caravan junior turned pale, overwhelmed with dismay.

The two men, however, gradually began to talk, and embarked haphazard on a political discussion. Braux supported the revolutionary and communistic doctrines and waxed vehement, his eyes glowing in his hairy face.

" Private property, sir," he shouted, " is a theft from the worker—the land belongs to everybody—inheritance is a disgrace and a shame ! "——But he stopped short in confusion, as though he had just said something foolish ; then added in a milder tone. " But it's not the moment to discuss these things."

The door opened, and Dr Chenet appeared. He had a moment's shock, then recovered himself, and went up to the old woman. " Ah, ha, the mother's looking well to-day ! Oh, I thought as much, mind you. I was saying to myself just now as I came upstairs : ' I'll warrant she'll be up, the old lady.' " And, tapping her gently on the shoulder, he added : " She's as solid as the Pont-Neuf ; you just wait ; she'll see us all into our graves."

He sat down, took the cup of coffee offered to him, and soon joined in the conversation of the two men, supporting Braux, for he himself had got into trouble in the Commune.

But the old lady, feeling tired, was about to go, when Caravan hurried to her. She fixed him with her eye and said : " As for you, you'll take back my chest of drawers and my clock at once."

Then as he was stammering, "Yes, Mamma," she took her daughter's arm and disappeared with her.

The two Caravans were left bewildered, dumb, overwhelmed in a frightful disaster, while Braux rubbed his hands as he sweetened his coffee.

Suddenly Mme Caravan, mad with rage, made a dash for him, yelling: "You're a thief, a scoundrel, a cad—I'll spit in your face; I—I—I——" She was speechless, suffocating, but he only laughed and went on drinking.

Then, as his wife was just returning, she rushed at her sister-in-law, and the two of them, one towering with her menacing stomach, the other epileptic and skinny, their voices unrecognizable, their hands trembling, heaped insult after insult upon one another at the top of their lungs.

Chenet and Braux interfered, and the latter, taking his better half by the shoulders, pushed her outside, saying: "Come along, you old donkey—you bray too loud!" And they were heard squabbling in the street as they went off.

M. Chenet took his leave.

The Caravans were left staring at each other.

Then he fell into a chair, and a cold perspiration broke out on his brow as he murmured:

"What am I going to say to the chief?"

